

EXPANSION OF RENEWABLE STEM CELL POPULATIONS

FIELD AND BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to methods of expansion of renewable stem cells, to expanded populations of renewable stem cells and to their uses. In particular, the present invention relates to methods of reducing the expression and/or activity of CD38. In one embodiment, *ex-vivo* and/or *in-vivo* stem cell expansion is achieved according to the present invention by downregulation of retinoic acid receptor (RAR), retinoid X receptor (RXR), and/or Vitamin D receptor (VDR) signaling, either at the protein level via RAR, RXR and/or VDR antagonists or at the expression level via genetic engineering techniques, such as small interfering RNA (siRNA) techniques. In another embodiment, *ex-vivo* and/or *in-vivo* stem cell expansion is achieved according to the present invention by downregulation of CD38 either at the protein level via CD38 inhibitors, such as, for example, nicotinamide, or at the expression level via genetic engineering techniques, such as small interfering RNA (siRNA) techniques. The present invention further relates to therapeutic applications in which these methods and/or the expanded stem cells populations obtained thereby are utilized.

An increasing need for *ex-vivo* cultures of hematopoietic and non-hematopoietic stem cells has arisen, in particular for purposes such as stem cell expansion and retroviral-mediated gene transduction. Methods for generating *ex-vivo* cultures of stem cells to date, however, result in a rapid decline in stem cell population activity, further resulting in a markedly impaired self renewal potential and diminished transplantability of the cultured cell populations. The need to improve such methods is obvious. Additionally, applications in gene therapy using retroviral vectors necessitate the use of proliferating hematopoietic stem cells, yet require that these cells remain undifferentiated while in culture, in order to maintain long-term expression of the transduced gene. Thus, the ability to maintain *ex-vivo* cultures of hematopoietic and non-

hematopoietic stem cell populations with long-term, self-renewal capacity is of critical importance for a wide array of medical therapeutic applications.

Presently, expansion of renewable stem cells have been achieved either by growing the stem cells over a feeder layer of fibroblast cells, or by growing the cells in the presence of the early acting cytokines thrombopoietin (TPO), interleukin-6 (IL-6), an FLT-3 ligand and stem cell factor (SCF) (Madlambayan GJ et al (2001) *J Hematother Stem Cell Res* 10: 481, Punzel M et al (1999) *Leukemia* 13: 92, and Lange W et al (1996) *Leukemia* 10: 943). While expanding stem cells over a feeder layer results in vast, substantially endless cell expansion, expanding stem cells without a feeder layer, in the presence of the early acting cytokines, results in an elevated degree of differentiation (see controls described in the Examples section and Leslie NR et al (*Blood* (1998) 92: 4798), Petzer AL et al (1996) *J Exp Med* Jun 183: 2551, Kawa Y et al (2000) *Pigment Cell Res* 8: 73).

In any case, using present day technology, stem cells cannot be expanded unless first substantially enriched or isolated to homogeneity.

The art presently fails to teach an efficient method for expansion of renewable stem cells without a feeder layer.

CD38 is a member of an emerging family of cytosolic and membrane-bound enzymes whose substrate is nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide (NAD), a coenzyme ubiquitously distributed in nature. In human, CD38 is a 45 kDa type II trans-membrane glycoprotein. Recently, it has been demonstrated that CD38 is a multifunctional enzyme that exerts both NAD^+ glycohydrolase activity and ADP-ribosyl cyclase activity and is thus able to produce nicotinamide, ADP-ribose (ADPR), cyclic-ADPR (cADPR) and nicotinic acid adenine dinucleotide phosphate (NAADP) from its substrates (Howard et al., 1993 *Science* 252:1056-1059; Lee et al., 1999 *Biol. Chem.* 380:785-793). The soluble domain of human CD38 catalyzes the conversion of NAD^+ to cyclic ADP-ribose and to ADP-ribose via a common covalent intermediate (Sauve, A. A.,

Deng, H. T., Angelletti, R. H., and Schramm, V. L. (2000) *J. Am. Chem. Soc.* 122, 7855-7859).

However, it was further found that CD38 is not characterized only by multi enzymatic activity but is further able to mobilize calcium, to transduce signals and to adhere to hyaluronan and to other ligands. Interaction with CD38 on various leukocyte subpopulation has profound though diverse effects on their life-span (Funaro A, Malavasi F *J Biol Regul Homeost Agents* 1999 Jan-Mar;13(1):54-61 Human CD38, a surface receptor, an enzyme, an adhesion molecule and not a simple marker).

CD38 is widely expressed in both hematopoietic and non hematopoietically-derived cells. Homologues of CD38 have also been found to be expressed in mammalian stromal cells (Bst-1) and in cells isolated from the invertebrate *Aplysia californica* (Prasad GS, 1996, *nature Structural Biol* 3:957-964).

Two of the metabolites produced by CD38, cADPR and NAADP, have been shown to induce the release of intracellular calcium in cells isolated from tissues of plants, invertebrates and mammals, suggesting that these metabolites may be global regulators of calcium responses (Lee et al., 1999 *Biol. Chem.* 380;785-793). Both cADPR and NAADP are known to induce calcium release from calcium stores that are distinct from those controlled by Ip^3 receptors (Clapper, D L et al., 1987, *J. Biological Chem.* 262:9561-9568).

Hence, CD38, being the best-characterized mammalian ADP-ribosyl cyclase, is postulated to be an important source of cyclic ADP-ribose *in vivo*.

Nucleoplasmic calcium ions (Ca^{+2}) influence highly important nuclear functions such as gene transcription, apoptosis, DNA repair, topoisomerase activation and polymerase unfolding. Although both inositol trisphosphate receptors and ryanodine receptors, which are types of Ca^{+2} channel, are present in the nuclear membrane, their role in the homeostasis of nuclear Ca^{+2} is still unclear.

It was found that CD38/ADP-ribosyl cyclase has its catalytic site within the nucleoplasm and hence it catalyses the intranuclear cyclization of NAD^+ , to produce nucleoplasmic cADPR. The latter activates ryanodine receptors of the inner nuclear membrane to trigger nucleoplasmic Ca^{+2} release (Adebanjo OA
 5 *et al. Nat Cell Biol* 1999 Nov;1(7):409-14 A new function for CD38/ADP-ribosyl cyclase in nuclear Ca^{2+} homeostasis).

It was further found that agonists of ryanodine receptors sensitize cADPR-mediated calcium release and antagonists of ryanodine receptors block cADPR-dependent calcium release (Galione A *et al.*, 1991, *Science* 253:143-
 10 146). Thus, it has been proposed that cADPR is likely to regulate calcium responses in tissues such as muscle and pancreas, where ryanodine receptors are expressed (Day *et al.*, 2000 *Parasitol* 120:417-422; Silva *et al.*, 1998, *Biochem. Pharmacol* 56:997-1003). It has been also shown that in mammalian
 15 smooth muscle cells, the calcium release in response to acetylcholine can be blocked not only with ryanodine receptor antagonists, but also with specific antagonists of cADPR such as 8- NH_2 -cADPR or 8-Br-cADPR (Guse, A H, 1999, *Cell. Signal.* 11:309-316). These findings, as well as others, indicate that ryanodine receptor agonists/antagonists such as cADPR can regulate calcium responses in cells isolated from diverse species.

As is discussed hereinabove, self-renewal of hemopoietic stem and
 20 progenitor cells (HPC), both *in vivo* and *in vitro*, is limited by cell differentiation. Differentiation in the hematopoietic system involves, among other changes, altered expression of surface antigens (Sieff C, Bicknell D, Caine G, Robinson J, Lam G, Greaves MF (1982) Changes in cell surface
 25 antigen expression during hematopoietic differentiation. *Blood* 60:703). In normal human, most of the hematopoietic pluripotent stem cells and the lineage committed progenitor cells are CD34+. The majority of cells are CD34+CD38+, with a minority of cells (< 10 %) being CD34+CD38-. The CD34+CD38- phenotype appears to identify the most immature hematopoietic
 30 cells, which are capable of self-renewal and multilineage differentiation. The

CD34+CD38- cell fraction contains more long-term culture initiating cells (LTC-IC) pre-CFU and exhibits longer maintenance of their phenotype and delayed proliferative response to cytokines as compared with CD34+CD38+ cells. CD34+CD38- can give rise to lymphoid and myeloid cells in vitro and have an enhanced capacity to repopulate SCID mice (Bhatia M, Wang JCY, Kapp U, Bonnet D, Dick JE (1997) Purification of primitive human hematopoietic cells capable of repopulating immune-deficient mice. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 94:5320). Moreover, in patients who received autologous blood cell transplantation, the number of CD34+CD38- cells infused correlated positively with the speed of hematopoietic recovery. In line with these functional features, CD34+CD38- cells have been shown to have detectable levels of telomerase.

Recently, it has been reported that granulocytic differentiation of human HL-60 cells (a committed cell line) can be induced by retinoic acid and is accompanied by a massive expression of CD38. Concomitant with CD38 expression was the accumulation of cADPR, and both time courses preceded the onset of differentiation, suggesting a causal role for CD38. Consistently, treatment of HL-60 cells with a permeant inhibitor of CD38, nicotinamide, inhibited both the CD38 activity and differentiation. More specific blockage of CD38 expression was achieved by using morpholino antisense oligonucleotides targeting its mRNA, which produced a corresponding inhibition of differentiation as well (Munshi CB, Graeff R, Lee HC, *J Biol Chem* 2002 Dec 20;277(51):49453-8).

In view of the findings described above with respect to the effect of CD38 on cADPR and ryanodine signal transduction pathways and hence on cell expansion and differentiation, the present inventors have envisioned that by modulating the expression and/or the activity of CD38, the expansion and differentiation of stem cells could be controlled. In particular, it was hypothesized that by reducing the expression and/or the activity of CD38, using agents that downregulate the expression of CD38 or inhibit the activity

thereof, expansion of renewable stem cells, devoid of differentiation, would be achievable.

Nicotinamide (NA) is a water-soluble derivative of vitamin B, whose physiological active forms are nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide (NAD⁺/NADH) and nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phosphate (NADP⁺/NADPH). The physiological active forms of NA serve as coenzyme in a variety of important metabolic reactions. Nicotinamide is further known to inhibit the enzymatic activity of CD38, to thereby affect the cADPR signal transduction pathway, a feature which is demonstrated, for example, in the studies described hereinabove (see, for example, Munshi CB, Graeff R, Lee HC, *J Biol Chem* 2002 Dec 20;277(51):49453-8).

Hence, while conceiving the present invention, it was hypothesized that nicotinamide, as well as other agents known to inhibit the enzymatic activity of CD38, can be utilized for expanding stem cell populations while inhibiting the differentiation of the stem cells. It was further hypothesized that other small molecules, which are capable of interfering, directly or indirectly, with the expression of CD38 can be similarly used.

Retinoic acid (RA), the natural acidic derivative of Vitamin A (retinol) is an important regulator of embryonic development and it also influences the growth and differentiation of a wide variety of adult cell types. The biological effects of RA are generally mediated through their interaction with specific ligand-activated nuclear transcription factors, their cognate RA receptors (RARs). Receptors of the retinoic acid family comprise RARs, RXRs, Vitamin D receptors (VDRs), thyroid hormone receptors (THR) and others. When activated by specific ligands these receptors behave as transcription factors, controlling gene expression during embryonic and adult development. The RAR and RXR families of receptors uniquely exhibit modular structures harboring distinct DNA-binding and ligand-binding domains. These receptors probably mediate their biological effects by binding to regulatory elements

(e.g., retinoic acid response elements, or RAREs) as RAR-RXR heterodimers that are present in the promoters of their specific target genes (1, 2, 3).

Retinoid receptors thus behave as ligand-dependent transcriptional regulators, repressing transcription in the absence of ligand and activating transcription in its presence. These divergent effects on transcription are mediated through the recruitment of co-regulators: un-liganded receptors bind corepressors (NCoR and SMRT) that are found within a complex exhibiting histone deacetylase (HDAC) activity, whereas liganded receptors recruit co-activators with histone acetylase activity (HATs). Chromatin remodeling may also be required, suggesting a hierarchy of promoter structure modifications in RA target genes carried out by multiple co-regulatory complexes.

The first retinoic acid receptor identified, designated RAR-alpha, modulates transcription of specific target genes in a manner which is ligand-dependent, as subsequently shown for many of the members of the steroid/thyroid hormone intracellular receptor superfamily. The endogenous low-molecular-weight ligand, upon which the transcription-modulating activity of RAR-alpha depends, is all-trans-retinoic acid. Retinoic acid receptor-mediated changes in gene expression result in characteristic alterations in cellular phenotype, affecting multiple tissues. Additional RAR-alpha related genes have been identified, designated RAR-beta and RAR-gamma, and exhibit a high level of homology to RAR-alpha and each other (4, 5). The ligand-binding region of the three RAR subtype receptors has a primary amino acid sequence divergence of less than 15 %.

Similarly, additional members of the steroid/thyroid receptor superfamily responsive to retinoic acid have been identified (6), and have been designated as the retinoid X receptor (RXR) family. Like the RARs, the RXRs are also known to comprise at least three subtypes or isoforms, namely RXR-alpha, RXR-beta, and RXR-gamma, with corresponding unique patterns of expression (7).

Although both the RARs and RXRs bind the ligand all-trans-retinoic acid *in vivo*, the receptors differ in several important aspects. First, the RARs and RXRs significantly differ in their primary structure, especially regarding their ligand binding domains (e.g., alpha domains exhibit a mere 27 % shared amino acid identity). These structural differences manifest in their differing relative degrees of responsiveness to various Vitamin A metabolites and synthetic retinoids. Additionally, tissue distribution patterns are distinctly different for RARs and RXRs. RARs and RXRs exhibit different target gene specificity. One example is regarding the cellular retinal binding protein type II (CRBP_{II}) and apolipoprotein AI proteins that confer responsiveness to RXR, but not RAR. Furthermore, RAR has also been shown to repress RXR-mediated activation through the CRBP_{II} RXR response element (8). These data indicate that the two separate retinoic acid responsive pathways are not simply redundant, but instead manifest a complex interplay.

Vitamin D (VitD) is an additional potent activator of one of the receptors belonging to the retinoid receptor superfamily. The nuclear hormone 1 alpha, 25-dihydroxyvitamin D (3) (1 alpha, 25 (OH) (2) D (3)) binds its cognate receptor (VDR) and acts as a transcription factor when in combined contact with the retinoid X receptor (RXR), coactivator proteins, and specific DNA binding sites (VDREs). Ligand-mediated conformational changes of the VDR comprise the molecular switch controlling nuclear 1 alpha, 25 (OH) (2) D (3), signaling events.

Cell-specific VDR antagonists reveal the exquisite control and regulation of the pleiotropic 1 alpha, 25 (OH) (2) D (3) endocrine system, with consequences in maintenance of calcium homeostasis, bone mineralization and other cellular functions. Antagonists to VitD were shown to act via the same mechanism: they selectively stabilize an antagonistic conformation of the ligand-binding domain of the VDR within VDR-RXR-VDRE complexes, inhibiting the interaction of the VDR with coactivator proteins and induction of transactivation. Interestingly, cells treated with VitD antagonists contain VDR-

RXR heterodimers in different conformations as compared to cells stimulated with VitD agonists (16).

Retinoic acid and VitD can cooperatively stimulate transcriptional events involving a common DNA binding site or hormone response element (HRE).
5 Conversely, VDR/RXR heterodimers have been found to bind without defined polarity and in a transcriptionally unproductive manner to certain RA response elements, and under these circumstances Vitamin D inhibits the response to RA. Although competition for binding to DNA may contribute to this inhibitory response, titration of common coactivators by VDR also appears to be involved
10 in this trans-repression. Therefore, the regulation of the transcriptional response to RA and VitD is dependent upon a complex combinatorial pattern of interaction among the different receptors, co-activators (17) and their binding to the appropriate DNA binding sites.

In parallel to their function as transcriptional regulators, retinoid
15 receptors such as RAR and RXR play important roles in regulating the growth and differentiation of a variety of cell-types, as well (18). RAR agonists such as all-trans-retinoic acid (ATRA) are predominantly known for their effects in inducing cell-differentiation, as seen in experiments utilizing malignant cancer cells and embryonic stem cells (19), where potent induction of terminal
20 differentiation was evident. Cell differentiation is not an exclusive result, however, as RA has been shown to exhibit different effects on cultured hematopoietic cells, depending on their maturational state (20). While retinoids accelerated the growth and differentiation of granulocyte progenitors in cytokine-stimulated cultures of purified CD34⁺ cells, use of stem cells
25 produced an opposite effect (42). Retinoid treatment has also been shown to inhibit differentiation of pre-adipose cells (43).

Whereas the RAR antagonist AGN 193109 exerted a positive effect on the differentiation of hematopoietic stem cells (41) the RAR agonist 4-[4-(4-ethylphenyl)dimethyl-chromen-yl]ethynyl}-benzoic acid] functions in an
30 opposing manner. Conversely, RAR antagonists have been shown to prevent

granulocytic differentiation in experiments utilizing the promyelocytic cell line, HL-60 (41). Similarly, creation of myeloid cell lines defective in signaling through their retinoid receptors do not undergo granulocytic differentiation in the presence of G-CSF (22), and retinoid-deficient tissues
 5 acquire a pre-malignant phenotype, and a concomitant loss of differentiation (29, 30). Malignant cell lines derived from various carcinomas exhibit diminished expression of retinoic acid receptor mRNA, implying that the loss of expression may be an important event in tumorigenesis (33, 34, 35, 36, 37). Furthermore, disruption of retinoic acid receptor activity, as evidenced in
 10 knock-out mouse models disrupted for the RAR gene, display an *in vitro* block to granulocytic differentiation (38, 39).

However, other studies using a similar approach have resulted in the development of hematopoietic cell lines (23). The hematopoietic stem and early progenitor cells are characterized by their surface expression of the
 15 surface antigen marker known as CD34⁺, and exclusion of expression of the surface lineage antigen markers, Lin⁻. Experiments utilizing several leukemia cell lines revealed that retinoic acid receptor mediated signaling results in the induction of expression of the differentiation marker CD38 cell surface antigen whereas antagonists to RAR abolished CD38 antigen up-regulation (24, 25).

Therefore, to date, the data are conflicting as to definitive roles for VitD
 20 and RA in induction of myelomonocytic and promyelocytic cell differentiation, or prevention of these processes. Although some previous studies with inactivation of RAR, RXR and VDR using antagonists, antisense technology or transduction methods with truncated receptors, yielded inhibited
 25 granulocytic and monocytic differentiation, these studies were conducted using leukemia cell lines that are blocked at the myeloblast or promyelocytic stage of differentiation (19, 22, 64). As stated above, isolation procedures for hematopoietic and other stem cells result in small populations of cells that are difficult to expand in *ex-vivo* cultures. Current culture methods enable large-
 30 scale expansion of progenitor and differentiated cell populations, but provide

minimal amplification of the stem cell component. Applications and uses of stem cell populations for cell replacement therapy, in-vivo tissue regeneration, ex-vivo tissue formation and gene therapy, necessitate the acquirement of large numbers of these cell populations.

5 There is thus a widely recognized need for, and it would be highly advantageous to have, a method of propagating large numbers of stem cells in an *ex-vivo* setting. Methods enabling *ex-vivo* expansion of stem cell compartments yielding large numbers of these cell populations will therefore pioneer feasible stem cell therapies for human treatment, with a clear and direct
10 impact on the treatment of an infinite number of pathologies and diseases.

 Some pathological and medically induced conditions are characterized by a low number of *in-vivo* self or transplanted renewable stem cells, in which conditions, it will be advantageous to have an agent which can induce stem cell expansion *in-vivo*.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

 The present invention discloses the use of various molecules for interfering with CD38 expression and/or activity, thereby inducing *ex-vivo* and/or *in-vivo* expansion of stem cell populations, resulting, when applied, for
20 example, to hematopoietic stem cells, in large numbers of undifferentiated CD34⁺/Lin⁻ (CD33, CD14, CD15, CD4, etc.), as well as CD34⁺/CD38⁻ cells, especially CD34⁺_{dim}/Lin⁻ cells.

 This novel and versatile technology may be used for *ex-vivo* and *in-vivo* expansion of stem cells, of hematopoietic and other origins, maintaining their
25 self-renewal potential for any *in-vivo* or *ex-vivo* application which requires large numbers of stem cell populations.

 While reducing the present invention to practice, it was unexpectedly found that nicotinamide, a well-known CD38 inhibitor, represses the process of differentiation of stem cells and stimulates and prolongs the phase of active cell
30 proliferation and expansion of the cells *ex-vivo*. It was further unexpectedly

found that a series of chemical agents, retinoic acid receptor antagonists of the RAR and RXR superfamilies, and Vitamin D receptor antagonists, which have been shown to affect CD38 expression, also repress the process of differentiation of stem cells and stimulates and prolongs, for up to 16-18 weeks, the phase of active cell proliferation and expansion *ex-vivo*.

These unexpected effects were surprisingly obtained when the source of cells was CD34⁺ enriched hematopoietic cells (stem and early progenitor cells) and, most surprisingly, when the source of cells included the entire fraction of mononuclear blood cells (whole fraction of white blood cells, which includes stem, progenitor and committed cells).

Equally unexpected was the finding that primary hepatocyte cultures incubated with the antagonists described above revealed an increase in the proportion of cells producing α -fetoprotein, hence signaling the proliferation of early hepatocytes. Supplementation of hepatocyte cultures with growth factors alone was not sufficient to stimulate proliferation of early hepatocyte populations, though growth factor supplemented RAR antagonist treated cultures responded similarly to unsupplemented RAR antagonist treated cultures. Furthermore, first passage of growth factor supplemented RAR antagonist treated cultures revealed the presence of a large proportion of oval cells, indicative of hepatocyte progenitor cells, while supplemented untreated cultures did not result in evidence of oval cell populations, hence following second passage revealed dramatically reduced numbers of hepatocytes. Thus only the presence of the RAR antagonist is sufficient to stimulate hepatocyte cell expansion.

This newly discovered effect of the nicotinamide as well as of the receptor antagonists of the RAR, RXR and VDR superfamilies, was used for maximizing the *ex-vivo* expansion of various types of cells as is further detailed hereinunder.

It is one object of the present invention to provide a method of *ex-vivo* expanding a population of stem cells, while at the same time substantially inhibiting *ex-vivo* differentiation of the stem cells.

It is another object of the present invention to provide a method of *in-vivo* expanding a population of stem cells, while at the same time substantially inhibiting *in-vivo* differentiation of the stem cells, thereby inducing *in-vivo* renewal of the stem cells.

It is yet another object of the present invention to use the expanded stem cells in different applications, including, but not limited to, post expansion cis-differentiation, post expansion trans-differentiation, post expansion genetic modulation, post expansion transplantations, post expansion implantations, adoptive immunotherapy and the like.

It is hence another more specific object of the present invention to provide a method of hematopoietic cells transplantation or implantation.

It is still another more specific object of the present invention to provide a method of genetically modifying stem cells with an exogene.

It is yet another object of the present invention to provide a method of adoptive immunotherapy.

It is an additional object of the present invention to provide a method of mobilization of bone marrow stem cells into the peripheral blood of a donor for harvesting the cells.

It is still an additional object of the present invention to provide a method of preservation of stem cells.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide stem cell collection bags.

It is still a further object of the present invention to provide assays of determining whether a specific retinoic acid receptor antagonist is suitable for inducing *ex-vivo* and/or *in-vivo* stem cell expansion.

It is still a further object of the present invention to provide assays of determining whether a specific retinoid X receptor antagonist is suitable for inducing *ex-vivo* and/or *in-vivo* stem cell expansion.

It is still a further object of the present invention to provide assays of
5 determining whether a specific Vitamin D receptor antagonist is suitable for inducing *ex-vivo* and/or *in-vivo* stem cell expansion.

It is still a further object of the present invention to provide assays of determining whether specific signaling through retinoic acid receptors is suitable for inducing *ex-vivo* and/or *in-vivo* stem cell expansion.

10 It is still a further object of the present invention to provide assays of determining whether specific signaling through retinoid X receptors is suitable for inducing *ex-vivo* and/or *in-vivo* stem cell expansion.

It is still a further object of the present invention to provide assays of determining whether signaling specific through Vitamin D receptors is suitable
15 for inducing *ex-vivo* and/or *in-vivo* stem cell expansion.

According to one aspect of the present invention, there is provided an assay of determining whether a retinoic acid receptor antagonist, a retinoid X receptor antagonist or a Vitamin D receptor antagonist is an effective cell expansion agent. The assay comprising culturing a population of stem cells or
20 cells of a substantially non-differentiated cell line, in the presence of the retinoic acid receptor antagonist, the retinoid X receptor antagonist or the Vitamin D receptor antagonist and monitoring expansion of the cells, wherein if increased expansion and decreased differentiation occurs, as compared to non-treated cells, the retinoic acid receptor antagonist, the retinoid X receptor
25 antagonist or the Vitamin D receptor antagonist is an effective cell expansion agent. Preferably, culturing the population of stem cells or cells of a substantially non-differentiated cell line is performed in a presence of an effective amount of a cytokine, preferably, an early acting cytokine. This assay can be used, by one ordinarily skilled in the art, to determine which of the
30 antagonists listed below is most efficient for the purpose of implementing the

various methods, preparations and articles-of-manufacture of the present invention which are further described hereinafter.

According to another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of *ex-vivo* expanding a population of stem cells, while at the same time,
5 substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*.

In one embodiment, the method comprises providing the stem cells with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for *ex-vivo* cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing the activity and/or expression of CD38, thereby expanding the population of stem cells while at the same time, substantially inhibiting
10 differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*.

In another embodiment the method comprises providing the stem cells with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for *ex-vivo* cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D, thereby expanding the population of stem cells
15 while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*.

In still another embodiment the method comprises providing the stem cells with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for *ex-vivo* cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to signaling
20 pathways involving the retinoic acid receptor, retinoid-X receptor and/or Vitamin D receptor, thereby expanding the population of stem cells while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*.

In yet another embodiment, the method comprises providing the stem cells with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for *ex-vivo* cell proliferation and, at the same time, with nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a
25 nicotinamide analog derivative or a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite, thereby expanding the population of stem cells while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*.

According to another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of *in-vivo* expanding a population of stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *in-vivo*.

5 In one embodiment, the method comprises administering to a subject in need thereof a therapeutically effective amount of an agent, the agent serves for reducing an expression and/or activity of CD38.

In another embodiment, the method comprises administering to a subject in need thereof a therapeutically effective amount of an agent, the agent serves
10 for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D.

In still another embodiment, the method comprises administering to a subject in need thereof a therapeutically effective amount of an agent, the agent serves for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to signaling
15 pathways involving the retinoic acid receptor, retinoid-X receptor and/or Vitamin D receptor.

In yet another the method comprises administering to a subject in need thereof a therapeutically effective amount of an agent selected from the group consisting of nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a
20 nicotinamide analog derivative and a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite.

According to yet another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of *ex-vivo* expanding a population of hematopoietic renewable stem cells *ex-vivo*.

25 In one embodiment, the method comprises obtaining adult or neonatal umbilical cord whole white blood cells or whole bone marrow cells sample and providing the cells in the sample with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for stem cells *ex-vivo* cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing the expression and/or activity of CD38, thereby expanding a population of a renewable stem
30 cells in the sample.

In another embodiment, the method comprises obtaining adult or neonatal umbilical cord whole white blood cells or whole bone marrow cells sample and providing the cells in the sample with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for stem cells *ex-vivo* cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D, thereby expanding a population of a renewable stem cells in the sample.

In still another embodiment, the method comprises obtaining adult or neonatal umbilical cord whole white blood cells or whole bone marrow cells sample and providing the cells in the sample with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for stem cells *ex-vivo* cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to signaling pathways involving the retinoic acid receptor, the retinoid X receptor and/or the Vitamin D receptor, thereby expanding a population of a renewable stem cells in the sample.

In yet another embodiment, the method comprises obtaining adult or neonatal umbilical cord whole white blood cells or whole bone marrow cells sample and providing the cells in the sample with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for stem cells *ex-vivo* cell proliferation and, at the same time, with nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative or a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite, thereby expanding a population of a renewable stem cells in the sample.

Further according to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of genetically modifying stem cells with an exogene.

In one embodiment, the method comprises (a) obtaining stem cells to be genetically modified; (b) providing the stem cells with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing the expression and/or activity of CD38, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*; and (c) genetically modifying the stem cells with the exogene.

In another embodiment, the method comprises (a) obtaining stem cells to be genetically modified; (b) providing the stem cells with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*; and (c) genetically modifying the stem cells with the exogene.

In still another embodiment, the method comprises (a) obtaining stem cells to be genetically modified; (b) providing the stem cells with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to signaling pathways involving the retinoic acid receptor and/or the retinoid X receptor and/or the Vitamin D receptor, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*; and (c) genetically modifying the stem cells with the exogene.

In yet another embodiment, the method comprises (a) obtaining stem cells to be genetically modified; (b) providing the stem cells with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for cell proliferation and with nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative or a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*; and (c) genetically modifying the stem cells with the exogene.

In a preferred embodiment, genetically modifying the cells is effected by a vector, which comprises the exogene, which vector is, for example, a viral vector or a nucleic acid vector.

According to still another aspect of the present invention there are provided transplantable hematopoietic cell preparations.

In one embodiment, a transplantable hematopoietic cell preparation of the present invention comprises an expanded population of hematopoietic stem cells propagated *ex-vivo* in the presence of an effective amount of an agent, the

agent reducing an expression and/or activity of CD38, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

In another embodiment, a transplantable hematopoietic cell preparation of the present invention comprise an expanded population of hematopoietic stem cells propagated *ex-vivo* in the presence of an effective amount of an agent, the agent reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

In still another embodiment, a transplantable hematopoietic cell preparation of the present invention comprises an expanded population of hematopoietic stem cells propagated *ex-vivo* in the presence of an effective amount of an agent, the agent reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid receptor, retinoid X receptor and/or Vitamin D receptor signaling, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

In yet another embodiment, a transplantable hematopoietic cell preparation of the present invention comprises an expanded population of hematopoietic stem cells propagated *ex-vivo* in the presence of an effective amount of an agent selected from the group consisting of nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative and a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

Further according to an aspect of the present invention there is provided an *ex-vivo* expanded population of hematopoietic stem cells, comprising a plurality of cells characterized by 3-20 % of the cells being reselectable for CD34⁺ cells, of which at least 40 % of cells are CD34⁺_{dim}, wherein, in the reselectable CD34⁺ cells, a majority of cells which are Lin⁻ are also CD34⁺_{dim}

cells. In one embodiment, the hematopoietic stem cells are derived from a source selected from the group consisting of bone marrow, peripheral blood and neonatal umbilical cord blood. In another embodiment, the population of cells has a single genetic background. In yet another embodiment, the *ex-vivo* expanded population of hematopoietic stem cells comprises at least N cells derived from a single donor, wherein N equals the average number of CD34⁺ cells derived from one sample of neonatal umbilical cord blood, bone marrow, or peripheral blood multiplied by 1,000. Cell surface expression of the CD34 and/or Lin markers can be determined, for example, via FACS analysis or immunohistological staining techniques. A self renewal potential of the stem cells can be determined by long term colony formation (LTC-CFUc) or by in vivo engraftment in a SCID-Hu mouse model.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of preserving stem cells comprising handling the stem cell in at least one of the steps selected from the group consisting of harvest, isolation and storage, in a presence of an effective amount of a retinoic acid receptor antagonist, a retinoid X receptor antagonist and/or a Vitamin D receptor antagonist. Alternatively, the method comprises handling the stem cell in at least one of the steps selected from the group consisting of harvest, isolation and storage, in a presence of an effective amount of nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative or a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite.

According to still a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a cells collection/culturing bag supplemented with an effective amount of a retinoic acid receptor antagonist, a retinoid X receptor antagonist and/or a Vitamin D receptor antagonist, which substantially inhibits cell differentiation, or with an effective amount of nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative and a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite, which substantially inhibits cell differentiation as well; and a cells separation and/or washing buffer supplemented with an

effective amount of a retinoic acid receptor antagonist, a retinoid X receptor antagonist and/or a Vitamin D receptor antagonist, which substantially inhibits cell differentiation, or with an effective amount of nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative and a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite, which substantially inhibits cell differentiation as well.

According to another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of hematopoietic cells transplantation or implantation.

In one embodiment, the method comprises (a) obtaining hematopoietic stem cells to be transplanted from a donor; (b) providing the stem cells with ex-vivo culture conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing an expression and/or activity of CD38, thereby expanding the population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells ex-vivo; and (c) transplanting or implanting the stem cells to a recipient.

In another embodiment, the method comprises (a) obtaining hematopoietic stem cells to be transplanted from a donor; (b) providing the stem cells with ex-vivo culture conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D, thereby expanding the population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells ex-vivo; and (c) transplanting or implanting the stem cells to a recipient.

In still another embodiment the method comprises (a) obtaining hematopoietic stem cells to be transplanted from a donor; (b) providing the stem cells with ex-vivo culture conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to signaling pathways involving the retinoic acid receptor, the retinoid X receptor and/or the Vitamin D receptor, thereby expanding the population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells ex-vivo; and (c) transplanting or implanting the stem cells to a recipient.

In yet another embodiment the method comprises (a) obtaining hematopoietic stem cells to be transplanted from a donor; (b) providing the stem cells with ex-vivo culture conditions for cell proliferation and with nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative or a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite, thereby
5 expanding the population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells ex-vivo; and (c) transplanting or implanting the stem cells to a recipient.

The donor and the recipient can be a single individual or different
10 individuals, for example, allogeneic individuals.

According to yet another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of adoptive immunotherapy.

In one embodiment the method comprises (a) obtaining hematopoietic stem cells from a recipient; (b) providing the stem cells with ex-vivo culture
15 conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing an expression and/or activity of CD38, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and (c) transplanting the stem cells to the recipient.

In another embodiment the method comprises (a) obtaining
20 hematopoietic stem cells from a recipient; (b) providing the stem cells with ex-vivo culture conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and (c)
25 transplanting the stem cells to the recipient.

In still another embodiment the method comprises (a) obtaining hematopoietic stem cells from a recipient; (b) providing the stem cells with ex-vivo culture conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to signaling pathways involving the
30 retinoic acid receptor and/or the retinoid X receptor and/or the Vitamin D

receptor, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and (c) transplanting the stem cells to the recipient.

In yet another embodiment the method comprises (a) obtaining
5 hematopoietic stem cells from a recipient; (b) providing the stem cells with ex-vivo culture conditions for cell proliferation and with nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative or a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting
10 differentiation of the stem cells; and (c) transplanting the stem cells to the recipient.

According to yet another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of mobilization of bone marrow stem cells into the peripheral blood of a donor for harvesting the cells.

15 In one embodiment the method comprises (a) administering an effective amount of an agent to the donor for reducing an expression and/or activity of CD38, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and (b) harvesting the cells by leukaphoresis.

20 In another embodiment the method comprises (a) administering an effective amount of an agent to the donor for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and (b) harvesting the cells by
25 leukaphoresis.

In still another embodiment the method comprises (a) administering an effective amount of an agent to the donor for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to signaling pathways involving the retinoic acid receptor and/or the retinoid X receptor and/or the Vitamin D receptor, thereby expanding

a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and (b) harvesting the cells by leukophoresis.

In yet another embodiment the method comprises (a) administering to the donor an effective amount of an selected from the group consisting of
5 nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative and a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and (b) harvesting the cells by leukophoresis.

10 Preferably, the methods of mobilization of stem cells further comprising administering to the donor at least one cytokine, preferably at least one early cytokine.

According to further features in preferred embodiments of the invention described below, reducing the expression and/or activity of CD38 is effected by
15 an agent that downregulates CD38 expression.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the agent that downregulates CD38 expression is selected from the group consisting of a retinoic acid receptor antagonist, a retinoid X receptor antagonist and a Vitamin D receptor antagonist. Alternatively, this agent is an
20 antagonist for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoid and/or Vitamin D.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the agent that downregulates CD38 expression is a polynucleotide.

25 According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the agent that downregulates CD38 expression the polynucleotide encodes an anti CD38, an anti retinoic acid receptor, an anti retinoid X receptor or an anti Vitamin D receptor antibody or intracellular antibody.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the agent that downregulates CD38 expression the
polynucleotide is a small interfering polynucleotide molecule directed to cause
intracellular CD38, retinoic acid receptor, retinoid X receptor or Vitamin D
5 receptor mRNA degradation.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the agent that downregulates CD38 expression the small
interfering polynucleotide molecule is selected from the group consisting of an
RNAi molecule, an anti-sense molecule, a rybozyme molecule and a
10 DNAzyme molecule.

According to further features in preferred embodiments of the invention
described below, reducing the expression and/or activity of CD38 is effected
by an agent that inhibits CD38 activity. The agent can be, for example,
nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog
15 derivative or a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite.

The nicotinamide analog is preferably selected from the group
consisting of benzamide, nicotinethioamide, nicotinic acid and α -amino-3-
indolepropionic acid.

According to further features in preferred embodiments of the invention
20 described below, providing the stem cells with the conditions for ex-vivo cell
proliferation comprises providing the cells with nutrients and with cytokines.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the cytokines are early acting cytokines.

According to still further features in the described preferred
25 embodiments the early acting cytokines are selected from the group comprising
stem cell factor, FLT3 ligand, interleukin-1, interleukin-2, interleukin-3,
interleukin-6, interleukin-10, interleukin-12, tumor necrosis factor- α and
thrombopoietin.

According to still further features in the described preferred
30 embodiments the cytokines are late acting cytokines.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the late acting cytokines are selected from the group comprising
granulocyte colony stimulating factor, granulocyte/macrophage colony
stimulating factor, erythropoietin, FGF, EGF, NGF, VEGF, LIF, Hepatocyte
5 growth factor and macrophage colony stimulating factor.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the stem cells are selected from the group consisting of
embryonic stem cells and adult stem cells.

According to still further features in the described preferred
10 embodiments the stem cells are hematopoietic stem cells.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the stem cells are derived from a source selected from the group
consisting of bone marrow, peripheral blood and neonatal umbilical cord blood.

According to still further features in the described preferred
15 embodiments the stem cells that undergo expansion are mixed (e.g., not
separated from, not enriched) with committed cells.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments the stem cells are enriched for hematopoietic CD34⁺ cells.

According to still further features in the described preferred
20 embodiments the hematopoietic cells are characterized by an absence, or
significantly diminished expression of cell surface antigens CD38, CD3, CD61,
CD19, CD33, CD14, CD15 or CD4.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments reducing the capacity of the stem cells in responding to signaling
25 pathways is reversible, e.g., inherently reversible.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments reducing the capacity of the stem cells in responding to the above
antagonists and/or signaling pathways of the above receptors is by *ex-vivo*
culturing the stem cells in a presence of an effective amount of at least one
30 retinoic acid receptor antagonist, at least one retinoid X receptor antagonist

and/or at least one Vitamin D receptor antagonist, preferably, for a time period of 0.1-50 %, preferably, 0.1-25 %, more preferably, 0.1-15 %, of an entire ex-vivo culturing period of the stem cells.

According to still further features in the described preferred
5 embodiments, the retinoic acid receptor antagonist is selected from the group consisting of:

AGN 194310; AGN 193109; 3-(4-Methoxy-phenylsulfanyl)-3-methyl-butyric acid; 6-Methoxy-2,2-dimethyl-thiochroman-4-one, 2,2-Dimethyl-4-oxo-thiochroman-6-yltrifluoromethane-sulfonate; Ethyl 4-((2,2 dimethyl-4-oxo-
10 thiochroman-6-yl)ethynyl)-benzoate; Ethyl 4-((2,2-dimethyl-4-trifluoromethanesulfonyloxy)-(2H)-thiochromen-6-yl)ethynyl)-benzoate(41); Thiochromen-6-yl]-ethynyl]-benzoate(yl); (p-[(E)-2-[3'4'-Dihydro-4,4'-dimethyl-7'-(heptyloxy)-2'H-1-benzothiopyran-6'yl] propenyl] benzoic acid 1'1'-dioxide; 2E,4E,6E-[7-(3,5-Di-t-butyl-4-n-butoxyphenyl)-3-methyl]-octa-
15 2,4,6-trienoic acid; 2E,4E,6E-[7-(3,5-Di-t-butyl-4-n-propoxyphenyl)-3-methyl]-octa-2,4,6-trienoic acid; 2E,4E,6E-[7-(3,5-Di-t-butyl-4-n-pentoxyphe-nyl)-3-methyl]-octa-2,4,6-trienoic acid; 2E,4E,6E-[7-(3,5-Di-t-butyl-4-n-hexoxyphenyl)-3-methyl]-octa-2,4,6-trienoic acid; 2E,4E,6E-[7-(3,5-Di-t-butyl-4-n-heptoxyphenyl)-3-methyl]-octa-2,4,6-trienoic acid; 2E,4E,6E-[7-(3,5-Di-t-butyl-4-n-octoxyphenyl)-3-methyl]-octa-2,4,6-trienoic acid; (2E,4E,6E)-7-[3-t-butyl-5-(1-phenyl-vinyl)-phenyl]-3-methyl-octa-2,4,6-trienoic acid; 2E,4E,6E-[7-(3,5-Di-t-butyl-4-{[4,5-sup.3 H.sub.2]-n-pentox-yl}phenyl)-3-methyl]-octa-2,4,6-trienoic acid; (2E,4E)-(1RS,2RS)-5-[2-(3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-ethoxy-phenyl)-cyclopropyl]-3-methyl-penta-2,4-dienoic acid ethyl ester; (2E,4E)-
20 (1RS,2RS)-5-[2-(3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-ethoxy-phenyl)-cyclopropyl]-3-methyl-penta-2,4-dienoic acid; (2E,4E)-(1RS,2RS)-5-[2-(3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-butoxy-phenyl)-cyclopropyl]-3-methyl-penta-2,4-dienoic acid; (2E,4E,6Z)-7-[3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-ethoxyphenyl]3-methyl-2,4,6-octatrienoic acid; (2E,4E,6Z)-7-[3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-butyloxyphenyl]-3-methyl-2,4,6-octatrienoic acid; 4-(5,6,7,8-
30 tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-2-naphthalene-carboxamido) benzoic acid;

(2E,4E)-3-methyl-5-[(1S,2S)-2-(5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-naphthalen-2-yl)-cyclopropyl]-penta-2,4-dienoic acid; p-[(E)-2-[3',4'-Dihydro-4',4'-dimethyl-7'-(heptyloxy)-2'H-1-benzothiopyran-6'-yl]propenyl]benzoic acid; 1',1'-dioxide, 4-(7,7,10,10-Tetramethyl-1-pyridin-3-ylmethyl-4,5,7,8,9,10-hexahydro-1H-naphto[2,3-g]indol-3-yl)-benzoic acid; (2E,4E,6Z)-7-[3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-methoxyphenyl]-3-methyl-2,4,6-octatrienoic acid; (2E,4E,6Z)-7-[3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-ethoxyphenyl]-3-methyl-2,4,6-octatrienoic acid; (2E,4E,6Z)-7-[3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-hexyloxyphenyl]-3-methyl-2,4,6-octatrienoic acid; (2E,4E,6Z)-7-[3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-octyloxyphenyl]-3-methyl-2,4,6-octatrienoic acid; and (2E,4E)-(1RS,2RS)-5-[2-(3,5-di-tert-butyl-2-butoxy-phenyl)-cyclopropyl]-3-methyl-penta-2,4-dienoic acid (2E,4E,6Z)-7-(3-n-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-tetramethylnaphthalene-2-yl)-3-methylocta-2,4,6-trienoic acid, 4-(5H-2,3(2,5 dimethyl-2,5-hexano)-5-n-propyldibenzo[b,e][1,4]diazepin-11-yl)benzoic acid, 4-(5H-2,3-(2,5-dimethyl-2,5-hexano)-5methyl-8-nitrodibenzo[b,e][1,4]diazepin-11-yl)benzoic acid, 4-{[4-(4-Ethylphenyl)2,2-dimethyl-(2H)-thiochromen-6-yl]ethynyl}benzoic acid, 4-[4-2methyl-1,2-dicarba-closo-dodecaboran-1-yl-phenylcarbamoyl]benzoic acid, 4-[4,5,7,8,9,10-hexahydro-7,7,10,10-tetramethyl-1-(3-pyridylmethyl)-anthra[1,2-b]pyrrol-3-yl]benzoic acid, (3-pyridylmethyl)-[5-thiaanthra[2,1-b]pyrrol-3-yl]benzoic acid, and (3-pyridylmethyl)-anthra[2m1-d]pyrazol-3-yl]benzoic acid.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments, the retinoid X receptor antagonist is selected from the group consisting of:

LGN100572, LGN100574, 1-(3-hydroxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-tetramethylnaphthalene-2-yl)ethanone, 1-(3-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-tetramethylnaphthalene-2-yl)ethanone, 3-(3-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-tetramethylnaphthalene-2-yl)but-2-enenitrile, 3-(3-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-tetramethylnaphthalene-2-yl)but-2-enal, (2E,4E,6E)-7-3[-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro 5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-2-naphthalene-2-yl]-3-methylocta-2,4,6-

trienoic acid, 4-[3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl]carbonyl]
 benzoic acid, 4-[1-(3,5, 5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-
 naphthyl)ethenyl] benzoic acid, 4-[1(3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-
 2-naphthyl)cyclopropyl] benzoic acid, 4-[1-(3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-
 5 tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)ethenyl] benzenete trazole, 2-[1-(5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-
 5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl) ethenyl]pyridine-5-carboxylic acid, 2-[1-
 (3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)ethyl]pyridine-5-
 carboxylic acid, ethyl-2-[1-(3,5,5,8, 8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-
 naphthyl)ethenyl]pyridine-5-carboxylate, 5-[1-3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-
 10 tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)ethenyl]pyridine-2-carboxylic acid, 2-[1-(3,5,5,8,8-
 pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl) cyclopropyl]pyridine-5-carboxylic
 acid, methyl 2-[1-(3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-
 naphthyl)cyclopropyl]pyridine-5-carboxylate, 4-[1-(3,5, 5,8,8-pentamethyl-
 5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)ethenyl]-N-(4-hydroxyphenyl) benzamide, 2-[1-
 15 (3,5,5,8,8-Pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl) ethenyl] pyridine-5-
 carboxylic acid, 2-[1-(3,5,5,8,8-Pentamethyl-5, 6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-
 naphthyl)cyclopropyl]pyridine-5-carboxylic acid, 4-[(3,5, 5,8,8-pentamethyl-
 5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)carbonyl]benzoic acid butyloxime, 4-[(3,5,5,8,8-
 pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl) carbonyl]benzoic acid
 20 propyloxime, 4-[(3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-terrahydro-2-
 naphthyl)carbonyl]benzoic acid cyanoimine, 4-[(3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-
 tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)carbonyl]benzoic acid allyloxime, 4-[(3,5,5,8,8-
 pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)carbonyl]benzoic acid 4-(3-
 methylbut-2-enoic acid)oxime, and 4-[(3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-
 25 tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)carbonyl]benzoic acid 1-aminoethyloxime (2E,4E,6Z)-7-
 (3-n-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-tetramethylnaphthalene-2-yl)-3-
 methylocta-2,4,6-trienoic acid, and 4-(5H-2,3(2,5 dimethyl-2,5-hexano)-5-n-
 propyldibenzo[b,e][1,4]diazepin-11-yl)benzoic acid, and 4-(5H-2,3-(2,5-
 dimethyl-2,5-hexano)-5methyl-8-nitrodibenzo[b,e][1,4]diazepin-11-yl)benzoic
 30 acid.

According to still further features in the described preferred
embodiments, the Vitamin D receptor antagonist is selected from the group
consisting of: 1 alpha, 25-(OH)-D₃-26,23 lactone; 1alpha, 25-dihydroxyvitamin
D (3); the 25-carboxylic ester ZK159222; (23S)- 25-dehydro-1 alpha-OH-D
5 (3); (23R)-25-dehydro-1 alpha-OH-D (3); 1 beta, 25 (OH)₂ D₃; 1 beta,
25(OH)₂-3-epi-D₃; (23S) 25-dehydro-1 alpha(OH) D₃-26,23-lactone; (23R) 25-
dehydro-1 alpha(OH)D₃-26,23-lactone and Butyl-(5Z,7E,22E-(1S,7E,22E-
(1S,3R,24R)-1,3,24-trihydroxy-26,27-cyclo-9,10-secocholesta-5,7,10(19),22-
tetraene-25-carboxylate).

10 The present invention successfully addresses the shortcomings of the
presently known configurations by providing a method of propagating cells, yet
delaying their differentiation by interference with CD38 expression and/or
activity, or with retinoic acid, retinoid X and/or Vitamin D receptor signaling.

The present invention further successfully addresses the shortcomings of
15 the presently known configurations by enabling, for the first time, expansion of
renewable stem cells in the presence of committed cells, so as to obtain an
expanded population of renewable stem cells, albeit their origin from a mixed
population of cells, in which they constitute a fraction of a percent.

Additional features and advantages of the methods cell preparations and
20 articles of manufacture according to the present invention will become apparent
to the skilled artisan by reading the following descriptions.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention is herein described, by way of example only, with
25 reference to the accompanying drawings. With specific reference now to the
drawings in detail, it is stressed that the particulars shown are by way of
example and for purposes of illustrative discussion of the preferred
embodiments of the present invention only, and are presented in the cause of
providing what is believed to be the most useful and readily understood
30 description of the principles and conceptual aspects of the invention. In this

regard, no attempt is made to show structural details of the invention in more detail than is necessary for a fundamental understanding of the invention, the description taken with the drawings making apparent to those skilled in the art how the several forms of the invention may be embodied in practice.

5 In the drawings:

FIG. 1A is a FACS analysis plot showing control cell surface marker expression with liberal expression of CD34, CD38 and lineage-related antigens.

FIG. 1B is a FACS analysis plot showing RAR antagonist (10^{-5} M) treated culture cell surface marker expression with a similar level of expression of the CD34 antigen, but an almost complete abrogation of the CD38 and lineage-related antigen expression, as compared to controls.

FIG. 1C is a FACS analysis plot showing RAR antagonist (10^{-6} M) treated culture cell surface marker expression with a similar level of expression of the CD34 antigen, but an almost complete abrogation of the CD38 and lineage-related antigen expression, as compared to controls.

FIG. 2A is a graph of data collected by FACS analysis showing comparable CD34⁺ cell expansion levels in control and RAR antagonist treated cultures.

FIG. 2B is a graph of data collected by FACS analysis showing markedly enhanced CD34⁺CD38⁻ cell expansion levels in response to RAR antagonist treatment, at either the 10^{-5} or 10^{-7} M concentrations, as compared to controls.

FIG. 2C is a graph of data collected by FACS analysis showing markedly enhanced CD34⁺Lin⁻ cell expansion levels in response to RAR antagonist treatment, at either the 10^{-5} or 10^{-7} M concentrations, as compared to controls.

FIG. 3A is a graph of data collected by FACS analysis revealing comparable CD34⁺ surface expression up to 2 weeks post seeding of control and treated cultures. Cultures were treated with an RAR antagonist, 10^{-5} M and 10^{-7} M [or 41 µg/liter to 0.41 µg/liter] and a combination of 4 cytokines (IL-6,

TPO, FLT3 and SCF), and were subjected to an additional positive selection step prior to FACS analysis. A marked increase in expression is seen, however, 9 and 11 weeks post seeding in cultures treated with RAR antagonists, as compared to controls.

5 FIG. 3B is a graph of data collected by FACS analysis showing comparable CD34⁺CD38⁻ surface expression up to 2 weeks post seeding of control and RAR antagonist and cytokine treated cultures, (as treated in 3A), in samples subjected to an additional positive selection step. A marked increase in expression is seen 9 and 11 weeks post seeding in RAR antagonist treated
10 cultures, as compared to controls.

 FIG. 3C is a graph of data collected by FACS analysis showing enhanced CD34⁺Lin⁻ surface expression by 2 weeks post seeding of RAR antagonist treated cultures, (as treated in 3A), as compared to controls, in samples subjected to an additional positive selection step. A markedly
15 increased expression is seen in the groups treated with RAR antagonist by 9 and 11 weeks post seeding.

 FIG. 4 is a graph of data collected by FACS analysis and LTC-CFU ability showing high levels of CD34⁺ cell proliferation and long-term colony forming unit ability in *ex-vivo* cultures treated with 10⁻⁷ M of the RAR
20 antagonist and a combination of the 4 cytokines, as above, up to almost 12 weeks post seeding. At 10 weeks and 11 weeks (CFUs and CD34 cells, respectively), these populations begin to decline.

 FIG. 5A is a FACS analysis plot of the negative control showing no background staining.

25 FIG. 5B is a FACS analysis plot of the positive control of reselected cell cultures showing ample CD34⁺ cell surface staining.

 FIG. 5C is a FACS analysis plot of the RAR antagonist treated cultures 2 weeks post reselection showing a marked leftward shift in profile, consistent with a less differentiated state.

FIG. 5D is a FACS analysis plot of the RAR antagonist treated cultures (10^{-7}) 11 weeks post reselection showing ample CD34⁺ cell surface staining, and a profile consistent with a more differentiated state.

FIG. 5E is a FACS analysis plot of the RAR antagonist treated cultures (10^{-5}) 11 weeks post reselection showing a marked leftward shift in profile, consistent with a less differentiated state.

FIG. 6A is a graph of colony forming unit data showing that both long-term cultures pulsed for the first 3 weeks with the antagonists or cultures administered RAR antagonists continuously reveal a 5-fold increase in CFU content as compared to control values.

FIG. 6B is a graph of cell enumeration data showing that long-term cultures either pulsed for the first 3 weeks with antagonists, or administered RAR antagonists continuously, reveal a 5-fold increase in CFU content as compared to control values.

FIG. 7 is a graph of mixed colony forming unit data showing that both long-term cultures pulsed for the first 3 weeks with the antagonists or cultures administered RAR antagonists continuously reveal a dramatic increase in CFU content as compared to control values, with pulse-treatment yielding the highest CFU values.

FIG. 8A is a photomicrograph of three weeks old primary hepatocyte cultures isolated from mice. Hepatocytes were probed for expression of α -fetoprotein (AFP) and counterstained with hematoxylin. Moderate AFP staining is evident (red-brown precipitate).

FIG. 8B is a photomicrograph of three week old primary hepatocyte cultures isolated from mice. Hepatocytes were incubated in the presence of 10^{-5} M retinoic acid receptor antagonist (AGN 194310) and were similarly probed for AFP expression and counterstained with hematoxylin. AGN 194310-treated hepatocytes revealed a marked increase in AFP expression, as compared to controls.

FIG. 9A is a photomicrograph of giemsa stained, three week old, primary

murine hepatocyte cultures revealing cell morphology. Few oval cells were noted in this sample (thick arrow), in contrast to numerous hepatocytes with typical morphology (narrow arrow)

FIG. 9B is a photomicrograph of giemsa stained, primary hepatocyte
5 cultures incubated in the presence of 10^{-5} M retinoic acid receptor antagonist (AGN 194310). Antagonist treated cells showed a marked increase in oval cell population (arrow).

FIG. 9C is a photomicrograph of giemsa stained, primary hepatocyte
cultures incubated in the presence of 10^{-5} M retinoic acid receptor antagonist
10 (AGN 194310) followed by trypsinization and replating, at a ratio of 1:2, in a culture medium devoid of cytokines. These cultures similarly revealed characteristic hepatocyte morphology

FIG. 10A is a photomicrograph of three weeks old primary hepatocyte
cultures isolated from mice, and supplemented with EGF (20 ng/ml) and HGF
15 (20 ng/ml). Hepatocytes were treated with RAR antagonist AGN 194310 at 10^{-6} M to 10^{-7} M, probed for expression of albumin and counterstained with hematoxylin. There is no appreciable background staining. Indicated that the cells expanded in cultures supplemented with the antagonist are hepatocytes by nature.

20 FIG. 10B is a photomicrograph of three weeks old primary hepatocyte control cultures isolated from mice, similarly supplemented with EGF and HGF and probed for albumin expression. Negligible background staining is evident here as well.

FIG. 10C is a photomicrograph of three weeks old primary hepatocyte
25 RAR antagonist treated cultures isolated from mice, similarly supplemented with EGF and HGF and probed for α -fetoprotein expression. Significant strong AFP staining is evident (red-brown precipitate), indicating expansion of progenitor cells.

FIG. 10D is a photomicrograph of three weeks old primary hepatocyte
30 control cultures isolated from mice, similarly supplemented with EGF and HGF

and probed for α -fetoprotein expression. Negligible staining is evident indicating a more differentiated cellular phenotype. All figures were photographed at 10x/0.3 magnification.

FIG. 11A is a photomicrograph of first passage hepatocyte control
5 cultures isolated from mice and supplemented with EGF and HGF, split 1:2 following 2 weeks in culture and cultured for an additional week prior to probing for albumin expression, as above. Numerous typical hepatocytes (small arrow) are evident.

FIG. 11B is a photomicrograph of first passage RAR antagonist AGN
10 194310 (10^{-5} – 10^{-7} M) treated hepatocyte cultures isolated from mice cultured as in A and probed for albumin expression. Typical hepatocyte morphology (small arrow) is evident in this frame as well.

FIG. 11C is a photomicrograph of first passage RAR antagonist treated
15 hepatocyte cultures, cultured and probed as in B. Numerous characteristic oval cells are evident (large arrow) in the field. Magnification - 20x/0.5.

FIG. 11D is a photomicrograph is a lower magnification of Figure 11C, revealing numerous islets of oval cells in the RAR antagonist treated cultures, consistent with a less-differentiated phenotype.

FIG. 11E is a photomicrograph of second passage hepatocyte control
20 cultures isolated from mice and supplemented with EGF and HGF, split 1:2 following 2 weeks in culture, cultured for an additional week prior to 1:4 split, and following a final additional 4 day culture, probing for albumin expression, as above. Few hepatocytes are evident.

FIG. 11F is a photomicrograph of similarly isolated and cultured second
25 passage hepatocyte cultures treated with RAR antagonist AGN 194310 (10^{-5} M to 10^{-7} M). Significantly greater numbers of hepatocytes are evident in the cultures as compared to controls. Magnification - 20x/0.5.

FIG. 12A is a plot presenting the FACS analysis of cultures treated with
30 cytokines only (control), RAR antagonist AGN 194310 (10^{-7} M) and a combination of RAR antagonist (10^{-7} M) and RXR antagonist, 3 weeks post

reselection. A marked leftward shift in profile of the combined, RAR and RXR antagonists, treatment, consistent with a less differentiated state, as compared with the untreated control and the RAR antagonist treatment is demonstrated.

FIG. 12B is a plot presenting a FACS analysis of cultures treated with cytokines only (control), RAR antagonist AGN 194310 (10^{-7} M), RXR antagonist LGN 100754 (10^{-7} M) and a combination of RAR and RXR antagonists (10^{-7} M), 5 weeks post reselection. A marked leftward shift in profile of the combined, RAR and RXR antagonists, treatment, consistent with a less differentiated state, as compared with the RAR antagonist treatment is demonstrated.

FIG. 13A is a bar graph presenting the data obtained by FACS analysis of cultures treated with a RAR antagonist AGN 194310, a RXR antagonist LGN 100754 and a combination thereof. Comparable CD34⁺ surface expression levels determined 3 and 5 weeks post seeding are evident. A marked increase in expression in cultures treated with a combination of the RAR and RXR antagonists, as compared with the untreated (cytokines only) control, the RAR antagonist and RXR antagonist treatments is demonstrated.

FIG. 13B is a bar graph presenting the data obtained by FACS analysis of cultures treated with an RAR antagonist AGN 194310, an RXR antagonist LGN 100754 and a combination thereof. Comparable CD34⁺/38⁻ surface expression levels determined 3 and 5 weeks post seeding are evident. A marked increase in expression in cultures treated with the combination of RAR and RXR antagonists, as compared with the untreated control (cytokines only), the RAR antagonist and the RXR antagonist treatments is demonstrated.

FIG. 13C is a bar graph presenting the data obtained by FACS analysis of cultures treated with an RAR antagonist AGN 194310, an RXR antagonist LGN 100754 and a combination thereof. Comparable CD34⁺/Lin⁻ surface expression levels determined 3 and 5 weeks post seeding are evident. A marked increase in expression in cultures treated with the RAR and RXR

antagonists combination, as compared with the untreated control (cytokines only), the RAR antagonist and the RXR antagonist treatments is demonstrated.

FIG. 13D is a bar graph presenting the total cell density of cultures treated with an RAR antagonist AGN 194310, an RXR antagonist LGN 100754 and a combination thereof. Comparable number of cells determined 3 and 5 weeks post seeding is evident. A significant increase of cell density in cultures treated with RAR+RXR antagonist 5 weeks post seeding, as compared with the untreated control (cytokines only), the RAR antagonist and RXR antagonist treatments is demonstrated.

FIG. 13E is a bar graph presenting the colony-forming unit (CFU) data of cultures treated with an RAR antagonist AGN 194310, an RXR antagonist LGN 100754 and a combination thereof. Comparable CFU levels determined 3 and 5 weeks post seeding are evident. A marked increase in CFU in cultures treated with the RAR and RXR combination, as compared with the untreated control (cytokines only), the RAR antagonist and the RXR antagonist treatments is demonstrated.

FIG. 14 is a bar graph presenting the density of CD34+ cells enumerated in 3 weeks culture. The cell culture was supplemented with SCF, TPO, FLt3, IL-6 and IL-3 cytokines, with or without nicotinamide at 1 mM and 5 mM concentrations. A marked increase in CD34+ cells density in the nicotinamide treated cultures is demonstrated.

FIG. 15 is a bar graph presenting the data obtained by FACS analysis of CD34+/CD38- cells in 3 weeks culture. The cell culture was supplemented with SCF, TPO, FLt3, IL-6 and IL-3 cytokines, with or without nicotinamide at 1 mM and 5 mM concentrations. A marked increase in CD34+/CD38- cell density in the nicotinamide treated cultures is demonstrated.

FIG. 16 is a bar graph presenting the data obtained by FACS analysis of CD34+/Lin- cells in 3 weeks culture. The cell culture was supplemented with SCF, TPO, FLt3, IL-6 and IL-3 cytokines, with or without nicotinamide at 1

mM and 5 mM concentrations. A marked increase in CD34+/Lin- cell density in the nicotinamide treated cultures is demonstrated.

FIG. 17 is a bar graph presenting the data obtained by FACS analysis of CD34+/(HLA-DR38)- cells in 3 weeks culture. The cell culture was supplemented with SCF, TPO, FLt3, IL-6 and IL-3 cytokines, with or without nicotinamide at 1 mM and 5 mM concentrations. A marked increase in CD34+/(HLA-DR38)- cell density in the nicotinamide treated cultures is demonstrated.

FIG. 18a is a dot plot presenting a FACS analysis of re-selected CD34+ cells from a 3 weeks culture treated with cytokines, with or without 5 mM nicotinamide. The CD34+/CD38- cells are shown in the upper left part of the plot, demonstrating a marked increase of CD34+/CD38- cells in the nicotinamide treated culture.

FIG. 18b is a dot plot presenting a FACS analysis of re-selected CD34+ cells from a 3 weeks culture treated with cytokines, with or without 5 mM nicotinamide, 3 weeks post reselection. The CD34+/Lin- cells are shown in the upper left part of the plot, demonstrating a marked increase of CD34+/Lin- cells in the nicotinamide treated culture.

FIG. 18c is a dot plot presenting a FACS analysis of re-selected CD34+ cells from a 3 weeks culture treated with cytokines, with or without 5 mM nicotinamide, 3 weeks post reselection. The CD34+/(HLA-DR38)- cells are shown in the upper left part of the plot, demonstrating a marked increase of CD34+/(HLA-DR38)- cells in the nicotinamide treated culture.

25 DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention is of methods of expanding a population of stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the cells *ex-vivo* and/or *in-vivo*. In one embodiment, the invention facilitates the efficient use as a therapeutic *ex-vivo* cultured cell preparation, which includes an expanded, large population of renewable stem cells, in which differentiation

was inhibited while cell expansion was propagated. Specifically in this respect, the present invention can be used to provide *ex-vivo* expanded populations of stem cells, which can be used for applications in hematopoietic cell transplantations, and in generation of stem cells suitable for genetic manipulations, which may be used for cellular gene therapy. Additional applications may include, but are not limited to, adoptive immunotherapy, treatments for multiple diseases, such as, for example, β -hemoglobinopathy, implantation of stem cells in an *in vivo* cis-differentiation and trans-differentiation settings, and *ex vivo* tissue engineering in cis-differentiation and trans-differentiation settings. The present invention further relates to expanded stem cell preparations and to articles-of-manufacture for preparing same.

The present invention discloses the use of various molecules (also referred to herein as agents), for interfering with CD38 expression and/or activity, thereby inducing *ex-vivo* expansion of stem cell populations, resulting, when applied, for example, to hematopoietic stem cells, in large numbers of undifferentiated CD34⁺/Lin⁻ (CD33, CD14, CD15, CD4, etc.), as well as CD34⁺/CD38⁻ cells, especially CD34⁺_{dim}/Lin⁻ cells. This novel and versatile technology may be used for *ex-vivo* and/or *in-vivo* expansion of stem cells, of hematopoietic and other origins, maintaining their self-renewal potential for any *in-vivo* or *ex-vivo* application which requires a large population of stem cells.

While reducing the present invention to practice, it was unexpectedly found that a series of molecules that are capable of interfering with CD38 expression and/or activity, repress the process of differentiation of stem cells and stimulates and prolongs, for up to 16-18 weeks, the phase of active cell proliferation and expansion *ex-vivo*. Following about 16-18 weeks of expansion, the cells begin to differentiate; hence, the effect of these molecules is reversible. In other words, treating the cells *ex-vivo* as herein described does not result in the cells transforming into a cell line.

This unexpected effect was surprisingly obtained when the source of cells was CD34⁺ enriched hematopoietic cells (stem and early progenitor cells)

and, most surprisingly, also when the source of cells included the entire fraction of mononuclear blood cells (whole fraction of white blood cells, which includes stem, progenitor and committed cells) were used. As is described in the Background section, presently there is no disclosed technology by which to expand non-enriched stem cells.

Furthermore primary hepatocyte cultures incubated with agents such as retinoic acid receptor antagonists of the RAR and RXR super families, revealed an increase in the proportion of cells producing α -fetoprotein, hence inducing the proliferation of early hepatocyte populations. Antagonist-treated hepatocyte cultures grown without cytokines persisted for at least 3 weeks in culture, a finding in stark contrast to previous data indicating an almost impossibility in growing primary hepatocytes for extended periods of time in culture, especially in the absence of cytokines (Wick M, et al. ALTEX. 1997; 14(2): 51-56; Hino H, et al. Biochem Biophys Res Commun. 1999 Mar 5;256(1): 184-91; and Tateno C, and Yoshizato K. Am J Pathol. 1996; 148(2): 383-92). Supplementation with growth factors alone was insufficient to stimulate hepatocyte proliferation, only RAR antagonist treatment of hepatocyte cultures resulted in the proliferation of early hepatocyte populations and in their persistence in culture, evident even following first and second passages.

This newly discovered effect of the molecules useable in context of the present invention was used for maximizing the *ex-vivo* expansion of various types of cells as is further detailed hereinunder and exemplified in the Examples section that follows.

The principles and operation of the present invention may be better understood with reference to the drawings and accompanying descriptions and examples.

Before explaining at least one embodiment of the invention in detail, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited in its application to the details of construction and the arrangement of the components set forth in the following description or illustrated in the Examples section. The invention is

capable of other embodiments or of being practiced or carried out in various ways. Also, it is to be understood that the phraseology and terminology employed herein is for the purpose of description and should not be regarded as limiting.

5 CD38 is a member of an emerging family of cytosolic and membrane-bound enzymes whose substrate is nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide (NAD). Two of the metabolites produced by CD38, cADPR and NAADP, have been shown to induce the release of intracellular calcium in cells isolated from tissues of plants, invertebrates and mammals, suggesting that these metabolites
10 may be global regulators of calcium responses (Lee et al., 1999 Biol. Chem. 380;785-793).

Recently, it has been reported that granulocytic differentiation of the human committed cell line HL-60 cells can be induced by retinoic acid and is accompanied by a massive expression of CD38. Concomitant with CD38
15 expression was the accumulation of cADPR, and both time courses preceded the onset of differentiation, suggesting a causal role for CD38. Consistently, treatment of HL-60 cells with a permeant inhibitor of CD38, nicotinamide, inhibited both the CD38 activity and differentiation. More specific blockage of CD38 expression was achieved by using morpholino antisense oligonucleotides
20 targeting its mRNA, which produced a corresponding inhibition of differentiation as well (Munshi CB, Graeff R, Lee HC, *J Biol Chem* 2002 Dec 20;277(51):49453-8).

Other studies have shown an opposite effect of CD38 signaling on progenitor cell differentiation. Short term treatment of human progenitor cells
25 with cADPR mediated a significant increase in colony size and colony output, implying a direct correlation between CD38 signaling and ex-vivo stem cell expansion (Podesta (2000) FASEB J. 14:680-690). In a more recent study reported by the same group, the effects of cADPR on engraftment of hemopoietic stem cells into irradiated NOD/SCID mice were addressed
30 (Podesta (2002) FASEB J. Dec 3 epub ahead of print). In this study a dual

effect of cADPR on human hemopoietic progenitors was demonstrated *in vivo*, essentially, enhanced proliferation of committed progenitors responsible for improvement of short-term engraftment; and expansion of human stem cells with increased long-term human engraftment into secondary recipients. Hence, these results suggest the use of cADPR to achieve long-term expansion of human stem cells.

Thus, the prior art studies conducted on human stem cells, thus far, teach the use of cADPR, a product resulting from CD38 catalysis, for *ex-vivo* or *in-vivo* expansion of human stem cells.

While reducing the present invention to practice, the present inventors have surprisingly uncovered that inhibition of CD38 activity or expression results in *ex-vivo* expansion of human stem cells and, at the same time, in limited differentiation of the cells.

Evidently, the prior art described above teaches away from the present invention.

Retinoid receptors such as RAR, RXR and VDR and their agonists, such as Vitamin A and its active metabolites and Vitamin D and its active metabolites are involved in the regulation of gene expression pathways associated with cell proliferation and differentiation.

Vitamin D, which was shown to be a differentiation inducer of myelomonocytic cells, transduces its signals via induction of heterodimerization of the RXR- VDR retinoid receptors (28), whereas RAR-RXR or RXR-RXR heterodimerization is essential for retinoids inducing granulocytic differentiation.

It was shown that the retinoids are essential for the maintenance of normal differentiation in many tissues. For example, in the epithelial system (29), retinoid-deficient tissues acquire a pre-malignant phenotype, which is characterized by enhanced mitotic activity and loss of differentiation (30). The RAR- β gene is expressed in normal epithelial tissue, where its expression is up-regulated by treatment with retinoic acid (31, 32). In many malignant cell

lines derived from various carcinomas the level of RAR- β 2 mRNA is decreased or undetectable (33-37), indicating that the specific loss of RAR- β 2 mRNA expression may be an important event in tumorigenesis.

The disruption of retinoic acid receptor (RAR) activity characterizes the human acute promyelocytic leukemia (APL) and is associated with a block of granulocytic differentiation, indicating that RARs are critical regulators of normal myeloid differentiation. Moreover, knockout mice, deficient in retinoic acid receptors display an in vitro block to granulocyte differentiation (38, 39).

Although the above evidence clearly portrays an important role for RARs in regulating myelopoiesis, several critical questions remain unanswered. If RAR activity is ligand concentration-dependent, then what is the mechanism by which RAR activity regulates myeloid differentiation of cells that are exposed to the uniform "physiological" concentrations of retinoids that are presumably present in blood and bone marrow? Most importantly from a clinical standpoint, why do only the acute pro-myelocytic leukemic cells (APL) exhibit a dramatic response to retinoids while the other 90 % of acute myelogenous leukemias do not, even though these other acute myelogenous leukemias express normal RARs (40)?

The biological effect of retinoids and retinoid receptors on normal, non-leukemic, hematopoietic stem cells was reported by Purton et al. (41).

Purton et al. (41) demonstrated that pharmacological levels (1 μ mol) of all-trans-retinoic-acid (ATRA) enhanced the generation of colony-forming cell (CFC) and colony-forming unit-spleen (CFU-S) in liquid suspension cultures of Lin⁻ c-kit⁺ Sca-1⁺ murine hematopoietic precursors. Purton et al. (41) further investigated the effects of ATRA as well as an RAR antagonist, AGN 193109, on the generation of transplantable cells, including pre-CFU-S, short-term repopulating stem cells (STRCs), and long-term repopulating stem cells (LTRCs). Purton et al. (41) demonstrated that ATRA enhanced the ex-vivo maintenance and production of competitive repopulating STRCs and LTRCs from Lin⁻ c-kit⁺ Sca-1⁺ cells cultured in liquid suspension for 14 days. In

addition, ATRA prevented the differentiation of these primitive stem cells into more mature pre-CFU-S during the 14 days of culture. In marked contrast, *Lin⁻c-kit⁺ Sca-1⁺* cells cultured with AGN 193109, an RAR antagonist, for 7 days had virtually no short- or long-term repopulating ability, but displayed an approximately 6-fold increase in the pre-CFU-S population. Purton et al. (41) conclusion from these studies was that the agonist to RAR, namely retinoic acid, enhances the maintenance and self-renewal of short- and long-term repopulating stem cells. In contrast, the RAR antagonist AGN 193109 abrogates reconstituting ability, most likely by promoting the differentiation of the primitive stem cells. Purton et al. (41) argue that these results imply an important and unexpected role of retinoids in regulating hematopoietic stem cell differentiation (41).

Whereas retinoids accelerates the growth and differentiation of granulocyte progenitors in cytokine-stimulated cultures of purified CD34⁺ cells (42), at the stem cell level, the retinoids show an opposite effect.

Although in a non-hematopoietic tissue, but in accordance with Purton et al. (41), Kamei also demonstrated that retinoids, especially all-trans-retinoic-acid, inhibit the differentiation of pre-adipose cells (43).

Hence, in the hematopoietic system, nuclear retinoid receptors were strongly implicated in pathways controlling and promoting downstream differentiation of lineage-committed cells. As was shown in detail for several leukemia cell line models, such as HL-60, NH4, and 32D, which are lineage committed cells that are blocked at the myeloblast or promyelocytic stage of differentiation, inactivation of these receptors by specific antagonists, antisense or transduction with truncated receptors is associated with inhibition of induced granulocytic and monocytic differentiation.

In contrast to normal cells, in leukemia there is a disruption between regulatory pathways controlling cell proliferation and differentiation. These pathways are strictly coupled in normal cells. The only exception in which these two processes, proliferation and commitment to differentiation are not

coupled, is the self-renewal proliferation pathway of the stem cells. Therefore, all the above studies do not teach the role of retinoid receptors at the stem cell level altogether (19, 22, 64).

While reducing the present invention to practice it was demonstrated
5 that retinoic acid antagonists, when added to *ex-vivo* hematopoietic or hepatocyte cultures for only a limited, short-term period, enable extended long-term expansion of self-renewable stem cells.

The antagonists did not have any significant positive or negative effect on overall cell and CD34⁺ cell expansion during the short-term cultures. In
10 addition, CD34⁺ antigen is expressed on committed as well as multi potent stem cells. Only a small fraction of the entire CD34⁺ cell population, the CD34⁺/CD38⁻ and CD34⁺/Lin⁻ cells, belong to the stem and early progenitor cell compartment.

Analysis of the content of these two rare subpopulations in two weeks
15 *ex-vivo* cultures revealed that cultures supplemented with a RAR antagonist contained higher percentages of CD34⁺/CD38⁻ cells and CD34⁺/Lin⁻ cells as compared to cultures treated only with the early acting cytokines Thrombopoietin (TPO), interleukin-6 (IL-6), an FLT-3 ligand and stem cell factor (SCF). The antagonist completely abolished the expression of the CD38
20 antigen. Also there was inhibition of a variety of other lineage-specific (Lin) antigens. The effect of the antagonist is specific and it is apparently targeted to key regulatory genes located at the checkpoint of self-renewal and commitment to differentiation decision. These conclusions are derived from the results described herein in the Examples section, showing that the RAR antagonist
25 down regulates only the expression of differentiation associated antigens, but not of antigens associated with stem cell phenotype such as the CD34 antigen. The percentages and absolute numbers of CD34⁺ cells were not affected by the antagonist during the short-term culture.

Further support for antagonist-specific effects on regulatory events of
30 self-renewal and commitment to differentiation comes from experiments

conducted herein with primary and passaged hepatocyte cultures. Primary cultures incubated with the antagonists revealed an increase in the proportion of cells producing α -fetoprotein, and in the number of histologically distinct oval cells, events associated with proliferation of early hepatocyte populations.

5 These early hepatocyte populations persisted for at least 3 weeks in culture, even in the absence of supplemental cytokines, a most unprecedented finding. Furthermore, supplementation of the cultures with growth factors had no effect on the proliferation of early hepatocyte populations, however RAR antagonist treatment enabled expansion of this population even following first passage,

10 and demonstrated significantly expanded hepatocyte populations following second passage, further indicating a role for antagonists in cellular self-renewal capability.

In addition to its effect on short-term cultures, while reducing the present invention to practice, it was demonstrated that short-term treatment

15 with the antagonist molecule also enabled the long-term ex-vivo expansion and self-renewal of stem cells, e.g. $CD34^+/Lin^-$ and $CD34^+38^-$ cells. Interestingly, limited exposure to the antagonist was sufficient to produce a significant and impressive prolongation of the long and extended long-term cultures as demonstrated by FACS analysis of stem cells and the functional LTC-CFUc.

20 During the long and extended long-term cultures, the content of CFUc and CFU-mix impressively increased as compared to the content of CFU in cultures treated only with the cytokines, which actually decreases during the long-term cultures. In fact, many of the control cultures were unable to maintain any CFU potential in the long and extended long-term culture. In

25 contrast to cultures treated for 3 weeks with the antagonist, which showed a dramatic and continuous increase of CFU-mix during the extended long-term culture period, cytokine-only treated cultures did not enable the expansion or even the maintenance of mix-colonies during the entire culture period. Expansion of stem cells, as revealed from the phenotype characterization, is in

30 complete agreement with the long-term self-renewal potential as measured by

the functional LTC-CFUc assay. Both assays demonstrate superior and prolonged expansion of self-renewing stem cells in cultures pulsed with the antagonist molecule.

It has been shown that RAR antagonists inhibited RA induced granulocytic differentiation of committed, promyelocytic HL-60 cells (25). It was also shown, that gene transfection of a truncated RAR inhibited the response of mouse derived myeloid leukemic cell line, 32D, to G-CSF (22). These studies, however, were performed with leukemic, lineage committed cell lines and specifically show only inhibition of granulocytic differentiation induced by RA or G-CSF. Hence, no regulation at the stem cell level can be concluded from the above studies.

The study presented herein is the first to demonstrate that an RAR antagonist molecule can regulate ex-vivo differentiation processes of normal stem cells.

As opposed to Purton et al. (41), whose teachings are described above, it is demonstrated herein, using antagonist molecules to retinoid receptors and human stem cell cultures, that retinoid receptors are involved in the regulation of stem cell self-renewal. It is further demonstrated herein that the addition of these molecules for only a limited, short-term period to the ex-vivo cultures media enables the continuous proliferation of stem cells with no alteration of their phenotype for extended time periods. Furthermore, these effects of retinoic acid receptor antagonists did not involve any cell transformation and do not result in any cell line formation.

Opposite to cell lines occasionally obtained by transduction with a truncated, dominant negative RAR (22-23), it is shown herein that, whether the antagonist was supplemented for only the first two to three weeks or continuously for the entire culture period, all cultured cells underwent normal myeloid, erythroid and lymphoid differentiation and completely lost any cell proliferation ability 16-18 weeks after the initiation of the cultures.

As opposed to genetic modifications obtained by transduction procedures that induce infinitive alterations in gene expression and cell functions (unless the transduced gene is shut off), continuous treatment with the RAR antagonist did not result in infinitive expansion or maintenance of CD34⁺/Lin⁻ phenotype. Therefore, the mechanism of activity of a dominant negative receptor is very different than the mechanism of RAR antagonist molecules. Additional supportive data of a different mode of action comes from experiments demonstrating that cells transduced with a dominant negative RAR remain immature even in the presence of a differentiation-inducers (22), which definitely is not the case with normal, non leukemic cells treated with an RAR antagonist.

Starting with normal mouse derived bone marrow (BM) cells and following transduction with a truncated RAR receptor, Collins (23) occasionally obtained a mouse-stem cell line. However, using the same mouse-derived cells and an RAR antagonist, Purton et al. (41) demonstrated that an RAR antagonist accelerated stem cell differentiation, whereas retinoic acid supported ex-vivo expansion of stem cells (41). These data provided by Purton et al. (41) and Collins (23) favor the existence of two different, unrelated mechanisms as herein discussed.

In addition to the retinoid receptors effect on hematopoietic tissue, it was demonstrated that receptors belonging to the retinoid receptor family are involved in differentiation pathways controlling normal embryogenesis as well as adult tissues development.

Multiple fetal anomalies occur in vitamin A deficient animals as well as in retinoic acid receptor gene 'knockout' mice, indicating that retinoic acid (an active metabolite of vitamin A) performs some essential functions in normal development. Retinoids are also long known to influence skin morphology. When antagonists to RAR are given late in gestation, 14 days post conception (dpc), they delay differentiation and maturation of the fetal skin and hair follicles in mouse (65).

RXR-alpha ablation results in epidermal interfollicular hyperplasia with keratinocyte hyperproliferation and aberrant terminal differentiation, accompanied by an inflammatory reaction of the skin. It was further shown that RXR-alpha/VDR heterodimers play a major role in controlling hair cycling, and suggested that additional signaling pathways mediated by RXR-alpha heterodimerized with other nuclear receptors are involved in postnatal hair follicle growth (66).

Taking together the above data, it is concluded that at the stem cell level, positive and negative signals via receptors belonging to the retinoid receptor family, control the physiological balance between self-renewal and commitment to differentiation of normal hematopoietic and non-hematopoietic stem cells.

The novel method of *ex-vivo* down-regulation of cell differentiation, enabled large expansion of embryonic and adult, hematopoietic and non-hematopoietic stem cells and may be utilized for transplantation of hematopoietic cells, gene therapy, cell replacement therapy or any other application, which requires increasing numbers of stem cells.

The utilization of a small molecule for obtaining large stem cell expansion is a feasible, economical and safe method.

Hence, in the course of the present study it was found that a series of chemical agents that bind retinoic acid, retinoid X and/or Vitamin D receptors interfere with proper receptor signaling. This interference can reversibly inhibit (delay) the process of *ex-vivo* differentiation of stem cells, thereby stimulating and prolonging active *ex-vivo* stem cell expansion.

This newly discovered effect of receptor antagonist application is utilizable for maximizing the *ex-vivo* expansion of various types of cells including hematopoietic cells, hepatocytes and embryonic stem cells. Such *ex-vivo* expanded cells can be applied in several clinical situations. The following lists a few.

Hematopoietic cell transplantation: Transplantation of hematopoietic cells has become the treatment of choice for a variety of inherited or malignant diseases. While early transplantation procedures utilized the entire bone marrow (BM) population, recently, more defined populations, enriched for stem cells (CD34⁺ cells) have been used (44). In addition to the marrow, such cells could be derived from other sources such as peripheral blood (PB) and neonatal umbilical cord blood (CB) (45). Compared to BM, transplantation with PB cells shortens the period of pancytopenia and reduces the risks of infection and bleeding (46-48).

10 An additional advantage of using PB for transplantation is its accessibility. The limiting factor for PB transplantation is the low number of circulating pluripotent stem/progenitor cells.

To obtain enough PB-derived stem cells for transplantation, these cells are "harvested" by repeated leukapheresis following their mobilization from the marrow into the circulation by treatment with chemotherapy and cytokines (46-15 47). Such treatment is obviously not suitable for normal donors.

The use of *ex-vivo* expanded stem cells for transplantation has the following advantages (49-50):

It reduces the volume of blood required for reconstitution of an adult hematopoietic system and may obviate the need for mobilization and leukapheresis (46). 20

It enables storage of small number of PB or CB stem cells for potential future use.

In the case of autologous transplantation of recipients with malignancies, contaminating tumor cells in autologous infusion often contribute to the recurrence of the disease (46). Selecting and expanding CD34⁺ stem cells will reduce the load of tumor cells in the final transplant. 25

The cultures provide a significant depletion of T lymphocytes, which may be useful in the allogeneic transplant setting for reducing graft-versus-host disease. 30

Clinical studies indicate that transplantation of *ex-vivo* expanded cells derived from a small number of PB CD34⁺ cells can restore hematopoiesis in recipients treated with high doses of chemotherapy, although the results do not yet allow firm conclusions about long term *in-vivo* hematopoietic capabilities of these cultured cells (46-47).

For successful transplantation, shortening of the duration of the cytopenic phase, as well as long-term engraftment, is crucial. Inclusion of intermediate and late progenitor cells in the transplant could accelerate the production of donor-derived mature cells thereby shortening the cytopenic phase. It is important, therefore, that *ex-vivo* expanded cells include, in addition to stem cells, more differentiated progenitor cells in order to optimize short-term recovery and long term restoration of hematopoiesis. Expansion of intermediate and late progenitor cells, especially those committed to the neutrophilic and megakaryocytic lineages, concomitant with expansion of stem cells, should serve this purpose (51).

Such cultures may be useful in restoring hematopoiesis in recipients with completely ablated bone marrow, as well as in providing a supportive measure for shortening recipient bone marrow recovery following conventional radio- or chemo-therapies.

Prenatal diagnosis of genetic defects in scarce cells: Prenatal diagnosis involves the collection of embryonic cells from a pregnant woman, *in utero*, and analysis thereof for genetic defects. A preferred, non-invasive, means of collecting embryonic cells involves separation of embryonic nucleated red blood cell precursors that have infiltrated into peripheral maternal circulation. However, since the quantities of these cells are quite scarce, a further application of the present invention would be the expansion of such cells according to methods described herein, prior to analysis. The present invention, therefore, offers a means to expand embryonic cells for applications in prenatal diagnosis.

Gene therapy: For successful long-term gene therapy, a high frequency of genetically modified stem cells with transgenes stably integrated within their genome, is an obligatory requirement. In BM tissue, while the majority of cells are cycling progenitors and precursors, stem cells constitute only a small fraction of the cell population and most of them are in a quiescent, non-cycling state. Viral-based (e.g., retroviral) vectors require active cell division for integration of the transgene into the host genome. Therefore, gene transfer into fresh BM stem cells is highly inefficient. The ability to expand a purified population of stem cells and to regulate their cell division *ex-vivo* would provide for an increased probability of their genetic modification (52).

Adoptive immunotherapy: *Ex-vivo*-expanded, defined lymphoid subpopulations have been studied and used for adoptive immunotherapy of various malignancies, immunodeficiencies, viral and genetic diseases (53-55).

The treatment enhances the required immune response or replaces deficient functions. This approach was pioneered clinically by Rosenberg *et al.* (56) using a large number of autologous *ex-vivo* expanded non-specific killer T cells, and subsequently *ex-vivo* expanded specific tumor infiltrating lymphocytes.

Functionally active, antigen-presenting cells could be grown from a starting population of CD34⁺ PB cells in cytokine-supported cultures, as well. These cells can present soluble protein antigens to autologous T cells *in-vitro* and, thus, offer new prospects for the immunotherapy of minimal residual disease after high dose chemotherapy. *Ex-vivo* expansion of antigen-presenting dendritic cells has been studied as well, and is an additional promising application of the currently proposed technology (57-59).

Ex-vivo expansion of non-hematopoietic stem and progenitor cells:

Additional applications of the technology proposed herein include the possibility for *ex-vivo* expansion of non-hematopoietic stem and progenitor cells, including, for example, neural stem cells, oligodendrocyte progenitors, and the like.

Myelin disorders form an important group of human neurological diseases that are, as yet, incurable. Progress in animal models, particularly in transplanting cells of the oligodendrocyte lineage, has resulted in significant focal remyelination and physiological evidence of restoration of function (60).

5 Future therapies could involve both transplantation and promotion of endogenous repair, and the two approaches could be combined with *ex-vivo* manipulation of donor tissue.

U.S. Pat. No. 5,486,359 illustrates that isolated human mesenchymal stem cells can differentiate into more than one tissue type (e.g. bone, cartilage, muscle, or marrow stroma) and provides a method for isolating, purifying, and
10 expanding human mesenchymal stem cells in culture.

U.S. Pat. No. 5,736,396 provides methods for *in-vitro* or *ex-vivo* lineage-directed induction of isolated, culture-expanded human mesenchymal stem cells comprising mesenchymal stem cell contact with a bioactive factor effective in
15 inducing stem cell differentiation into a lineage of choice. Further disclosed is a method including introducing culture-expanded lineage-induced mesenchymal stem cells into the original, autologous host, for purposes of mesenchymal tissue regeneration or repair.

U.S. Pat. No. 4,642,120 provides compositions for repairing defects in
20 cartilage and bones. These are provided in gel form either as such, or embedded in natural or artificial bones. The gel comprises certain types of cells. Cells may be committed embryonal chondrocytes or any mesenchymal-origin cells which potentially can be converted to become functional cartilage cells, typically by the inclusion of chondrogenic inducing factors, in
25 combination with fibrinogen, antiprotease and thrombin.

U.S. Pat. No. 5,654,186 illustrates that blood-borne mesenchymal cells proliferate in culture, and *in-vivo*, as demonstrated in animal models, and are capable of migrating into wound sites from the blood to form skin.

U.S. Pat. No. 5,716,411 reveals a method of skin regeneration of a
30 wound or burn in an animal or human. This method comprises the steps of

initially covering the wound with a collagen glycosaminoglycan (GC) matrix, facilitating mesenchymal cell and blood vessel infiltration from healthy underlying tissue within the grafted GC matrix. Subsequently a cultured epithelial autograft sheet grown from epidermal cells taken from the animal or human at a wound-free site is applied on the body surface. The resulting graft has excellent inclusion rates and has the appearance, growth, maturation and differentiation of normal skin.

U.S. Pat. No. 5,716,616 provides methods for treating recipients suffering from diseases, disorders or conditions characterized by bone, cartilage, or lung defects. The methods comprise intravenous administration of stromal cells isolated from normal, syngeneic individuals, or intravenous administration of stromal cells isolated from the recipient subsequent to correction of the genetic defect in the isolated cells. Methods of introducing genes into a recipient individual are also disclosed. The methods comprise obtaining a bone marrow sample from either the recipient individual or a matched syngeneic donor and isolating adherent cells from the sample. Once isolated, donor adherent cells are transfected with a gene and administered to a recipient individual intravenously. Compositions comprising isolated stromal cells that include exogenous genes operably linked to regulatory sequences are disclosed, as well.

In each of the above examples, non-hematopoietic stem and progenitor cells are used as an external source of cells for replenishing missing or damaged cells of an organ. Such use requires high levels of stem and progenitor cell expansion for successful application of the proposed therapies. Because of this pressing need for large numbers of expanded stem and progenitor cell populations, the methods and applications of the present invention address a critical niche in any of the methods disclosed in the above U.S. patents.

Additional examples for both ex-vivo and in-vivo applications:

Additional applications of stem and progenitor cell expansion include skin regeneration, hepatic regeneration, muscle regeneration and stimulation of bone growth for applications in osteoporosis.

Mobilization of bone marrow stem cells into peripheral blood (peripheralization): Effects of retinoic acid, retinoid and/or Vitamin D receptor antagonists have additional *in-vivo* applications. As mentioned above, PB-derived stem cells for transplantation are "harvested" by repeated leukapheresis following their mobilization from the marrow into the circulation by treatment with chemotherapy and cytokines (46-47).

The use of chemotherapy is, of course, not suitable for normal donors. Administration of antagonists, into the donor could increase the marrow stem cell pool, which is then mobilized into the periphery by endogenous or injected G-CSF.

Stimulation of fetal hemoglobin production: Increased fetal hemoglobin has been shown to ameliorate clinical symptoms in recipients suffering β - hemoglobinopathies, such as sickle cell anemia and β -thalassemia (61).

Fetal hemoglobin, which normally comprises 1 % of the total hemoglobin, becomes elevated in accelerated erythropoiesis (e.g., following acute hemolysis or hemorrhage or administration of erythropoietin) (62).

It has been suggested that this phenomenon is associated with acceleration of the maturation/differentiation process of erythroid precursors (63). Administration of retinoic acid, retinoid and/or Vitamin D receptor antagonists to recipients with β -hemoglobinopathies might first increase and synchronize their early erythroid progenitor pool, by blocking progenitor differentiation.

Following cessation of administration of the drug and its removal from the body, this early population then might undergo accelerated maturation, which may result in an elevated production of fetal hemoglobin.

The following description provides more details relating to specific aspects and embodiments of the present invention.

According to one aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of *ex-vivo* expanding a population of stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*. The method according to this aspect of the present invention is effected by providing the stem cells with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for *ex-vivo* cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing an expression and/or activity of CD38, thereby expanding the population of stem cells while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*.

As used herein, the phrase "stem cells" refers to pluripotent cells that, given the right growth conditions, may develop to any cell lineage present in the organism from which they were derived. The phrase, as used herein, refers both to the earliest renewable cell population responsible for generating cell mass in a tissue or body and the very early progenitor cells, which are somewhat more differentiated, yet are not committed and can readily revert to become a part of the earliest renewable cell population. Methods of *ex-vivo* culturing stem cells of different tissue origins are well known in the art of cell culturing. To this effect, see for example, the text book "Culture of Animal Cells - A Manual of Basic Technique" by Freshney, Wiley-Liss, N. Y. (1994), Third Edition, the teachings of which are hereby incorporated by reference.

As used herein the term "inhibiting" refers to slowing, decreasing, delaying, preventing or abolishing.

As used herein the term "differentiation" refers to relatively generalized or specialized changes during development. Cell differentiation of various lineages is a well-documented process and requires no further description herein. As used herein the term differentiation is distinct from maturation which is a process, although some times associated with cell division, in which a specific cell type mature to function and then dies, e.g., via programmed cell death.

The phrase “cell expansion” is used herein to describe a process of cell proliferation substantially devoid of cell differentiation. Cells that undergo expansion hence maintain their cell renewal properties and are oftentimes referred to herein as renewable cells, e.g., renewable stem cells.

5 As used herein the term "*ex-vivo*" refers to a process in which cells are removed from a living organism and are propagated outside the organism (e.g., in a test tube). As used herein, the term "*ex-vivo*", however, does not refer to a process by which cells known to propagate only *in-vitro*, such as various cell lines (e.g., HL-60, MEL, HeLa, etc.) are cultured. In other words, cells
10 expanded *ex-vivo* according to the present invention do not transform into cell lines in that they eventually undergo differentiation.

Providing the *ex-vivo* grown cells with conditions for *ex-vivo* cell proliferation include providing the cells with nutrients and preferably with one or more cytokines, as is further detailed hereinunder.

15 As mentioned hereinabove, concomitant with treating the cells with conditions which allow for *ex-vivo* the stem cells to proliferate, the cells are short-term treated or long-term treated to reduce the expression and/or activity of CD38.

Reducing the activity of CD38 is effected by providing the cells with an
20 agent that inhibits CD38 activity (i.e., a CD38 inhibitor).

As used herein a “CD38 inhibitor” refers to an agent which is capable of down-regulating or suppressing CD38 activity in stem cells.

A CD38 inhibitor according to this aspect of the present invention can be a “direct inhibitor” which inhibits CD38 intrinsic activity or an “indirect
25 inhibitor” which inhibits the activity or expression of CD38 signaling components (e.g., the cADPR and ryanodine signaling pathways) or other signaling pathways which are effected by CD38 activity.

According to presently known embodiments of this aspect of the present invention, nicotinamide is a preferred CD38 inhibitor.

Hence, in one embodiment, the method according to this aspect of the present invention is effected by providing the cells either with nicotinamide itself, or with a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative or a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite.

5 As used herein, the phrase "nicotinamide analog" refers to any molecule that is known to act similarly to nicotinamide. Representative examples of nicotinamide analogs include, without limitation, benzamide, nicotinethioamide (the thiol analog of nicotinamide), nicotinic acid and α -amino-3-indolepropionic acid.

10 The phrase "a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative" refers to any structural derivative of nicotinamide itself or of an analog of nicotinamide. Examples of such derivatives include, without limitation, substituted benzamides, substituted nicotinamides and nicotinethioamides and N-substituted nicotinamides and nicotinethioamides.

15 The phrase "a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite" refers to products that are derived from nicotinamide or from analogs thereof such as, for example, NAD, NADH and NADPH.

Alternatively, a CD38 inhibitor according to this aspect of the present invention can be an activity neutralizing antibody which binds for example to the CD38 catalytic domain, thereby inhibiting CD38 catalytic activity. It will be appreciated, though, that since CD38 is an intracellular protein measures are taken to use inhibitors which may be delivered through the plasma membrane. In this respect a fragmented antibody such as a Fab fragment (described hereinunder) is preferably used.

25 The term "antibody" as used in this invention includes intact molecules as well as functional fragments thereof, such as Fab, F(ab')₂, and Fv that are capable of binding to macrophages. These functional antibody fragments are defined as follows:

Fab, the fragment which contains a monovalent antigen-binding
30 fragment of an antibody molecule, can be produced by digestion of whole

antibody with the enzyme papain to yield an intact light chain and a portion of one heavy chain;

Fab', the fragment of an antibody molecule that can be obtained by treating whole antibody with pepsin, followed by reduction, to yield an intact
5 light chain and a portion of the heavy chain; two Fab' fragments are obtained per antibody molecule;

(Fab')₂, the fragment of the antibody that can be obtained by treating whole antibody with the enzyme pepsin without subsequent reduction; F(ab')₂ is a dimer of two Fab' fragments held together by two disulfide bonds;

10 Fv, defined as a genetically engineered fragment containing the variable region of the light chain and the variable region of the heavy chain expressed as two chains; and

Single chain antibody ("SCA"), a genetically engineered molecule containing the variable region of the light chain and the variable region of the
15 heavy chain, linked by a suitable polypeptide linker as a genetically fused single chain molecule.

Methods of making these fragments are known in the art. (See for example, Harlow and Lane, Antibodies: A Laboratory Manual, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, New York, 1988, incorporated herein by reference).

20 Antibody fragments according to the present invention can be prepared by expression in E. coli or mammalian cells (e.g. Chinese hamster ovary cell culture or other protein expression systems) of DNA encoding the fragment.

Antibody fragments can be obtained by pepsin or papain digestion of whole antibodies by conventional methods. For example, antibody fragments
25 can be produced by enzymatic cleavage of antibodies with pepsin to provide a 5S fragment denoted F(ab')₂. This fragment can be further cleaved using a thiol reducing agent, and optionally a blocking group for the sulfhydryl groups resulting from cleavage of disulfide linkages, to produce 3.5S Fab' monovalent fragments. Alternatively, an enzymatic cleavage using pepsin produces two
30 monovalent Fab' fragments and an Fc fragment directly. These methods are

described, for example, by Goldenberg, U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,036,945 and 4,331,647, and references contained therein, which patents are hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety. See also Porter, R. R., *Biochem. J.*, 73: 119-126, 1959. Other methods of cleaving antibodies, such as separation of heavy chains to form monovalent light-heavy chain fragments, further cleavage of fragments, or other enzymatic, chemical, or genetic techniques may also be used, so long as the fragments bind to the antigen that is recognized by the intact antibody.

Fv fragments comprise an association of V_H and V_L chains. This association may be noncovalent, as described in Inbar et al., *Proc. Nat'l Acad. Sci. USA* 69:2659-62, 1972. Alternatively, the variable chains can be linked by an intermolecular disulfide bond or cross-linked by chemicals such as glutaraldehyde. Preferably, the Fv fragments comprise V_H and V_L chains connected by a peptide linker. These single-chain antigen binding proteins (sFv) are prepared by constructing a structural gene comprising DNA sequences encoding the V_H and V_L domains connected by an oligonucleotide. The structural gene is inserted into an expression vector, which is subsequently introduced into a host cell such as *E. coli*. The recombinant host cells synthesize a single polypeptide chain with a linker peptide bridging the two V domains. Methods for producing sFvs are described, for example, by Whitlow and Filpula, *Methods*, 2: 97-105, 1991; Bird et al., *Science* 242:423-426, 1988; Pack et al., *Bio/Technology* 11:1271-77, 1993; and Ladner et al., U.S. Pat. No. 4,946,778, which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

Another form of an antibody fragment is a peptide coding for a single complementarity-determining region (CDR). CDR peptides ("minimal recognition units") can be obtained by constructing genes encoding the CDR of an antibody of interest. Such genes are prepared, for example, by using the polymerase chain reaction to synthesize the variable region from RNA of antibody-producing cells. See, for example, Larrick and Fry, *Methods*, 2: 106-10, 1991.

Humanized forms of non-human (e.g., murine) antibodies are chimeric molecules of immunoglobulins, immunoglobulin chains or fragments thereof (such as Fv, Fab, Fab', F(ab')₂ or other antigen-binding subsequences of antibodies) which contain minimal sequence derived from non-human immunoglobulin. Humanized antibodies include human immunoglobulins recipient antibody in which residues form a complementary determining region (CDR) of the recipient are replaced by residues from a CDR of a non-human species (donor antibody) such as mouse, rat or rabbit having the desired specificity, affinity and capacity. In some instances, Fv framework residues of the human immunoglobulin are replaced by corresponding non-human residues. Humanized antibodies may also comprise residues which are found neither in the recipient antibody nor in the imported CDR or framework sequences. In general, the humanized antibody will comprise substantially all of at least one, and typically two, variable domains, in which all or substantially all of the CDR regions correspond to those of a non-human immunoglobulin and all or substantially all of the FR regions are those of a human immunoglobulin consensus sequence. The humanized antibody optimally also will comprise at least a portion of an immunoglobulin constant region (Fc), typically that of a human immunoglobulin [Jones et al., *Nature*, 321:522-525 (1986); Riechmann et al., *Nature*, 332:323-329 (1988); and Presta, *Curr. Op. Struct. Biol.*, 2:593-596 (1992)].

Methods for humanizing non-human antibodies are well known in the art. Generally, a humanized antibody has one or more amino acid residues introduced into it from a source which is non-human. These non-human amino acid residues are often referred to as import residues, which are typically taken from an import variable domain. Humanization can be essentially performed following the method of Winter and co-workers [Jones et al., *Nature*, 321:522-525 (1986); Riechmann et al., *Nature* 332:323-327 (1988); Verhoeyen et al., *Science*, 239:1534-1536 (1988)], by substituting rodent CDRs or CDR sequences for the corresponding sequences of a human antibody. Accordingly,

such humanized antibodies are chimeric antibodies (U.S. Pat. No. 4,816,567), wherein substantially less than an intact human variable domain has been substituted by the corresponding sequence from a non-human species. In practice, humanized antibodies are typically human antibodies in which some CDR residues and possibly some FR residues are substituted by residues from analogous sites in rodent antibodies.

Human antibodies can also be produced using various techniques known in the art, including phage display libraries (Hoogenboom and Winter, J. Mol. Biol., 227:381 (1991); Marks et al., J. Mol. Biol., 222:581 (1991)). The techniques of Cole et al. and Boerner et al. are also available for the preparation of human monoclonal antibodies (Cole et al., Monoclonal Antibodies and Cancer Therapy, Alan R. Liss, p. 77 (1985) and Boerner et al., J. Immunol., 147(1):86-95 (1991)]. Similarly, human can be made by introducing of human immunoglobulin loci into transgenic animals, e.g., mice in which the endogenous immunoglobulin genes have been partially or completely inactivated. Upon challenge, human antibody production is observed, which closely resembles that seen in humans in all respects, including gene rearrangement, assembly, and antibody repertoire. This approach is described, for example, in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,545,807; 5,545,806; 5,569,825; 5,625,126; 5,633,425; 5,661,016, and in the following scientific publications: Marks et al., Bio/Technology 10, 779-783 (1992); Lonberg et al., Nature 368 856-859 (1994); Morrison, Nature 368 812-13 (1994); Fishwild et al., Nature Biotechnology 14, 845-51 (1996); Neuberger, Nature Biotechnology 14, 826 (1996); Lonberg and Huszar, Intern. Rev. Immunol. 13 65-93 (1995).

Alternatively, the method according to this aspect of the present invention can be effected by providing the *ex-vivo* cultured stem cells with an agent that down-regulates CD38 expression.

An agent that downregulates CD38 expression refers to any agent which affects CD38 synthesis (decelerates) or degradation (accelerates) either at the level of the mRNA or at the level of the protein. For example, a small

interfering polynucleotide molecule which is designed to down regulate the expression of CD38 can be used according to this aspect of the present invention.

An example for a small interfering polynucleotide molecule which can
5 down-regulate the expression of CD38 is a small interfering RNA or siRNA,
such as, for example, the morpholino antisense oligonucleotides described by
in Munshi et al. (Munshi CB, Graeff R, Lee HC, *J Biol Chem* 2002 Dec
20;277(51):49453-8), which includes duplex oligonucleotides which direct
sequence specific degradation of mRNA through the previously described
10 mechanism of RNA interference (RNAi) (Hutvagner and Zamore (2002) Curr.
Opin. Genetics and Development 12:225-232).

As used herein, the phrase "duplex oligonucleotide" refers to an
oligonucleotide structure or mimetics thereof, which is formed by either a single
self-complementary nucleic acid strand or by at least two complementary
15 nucleic acid strands. The "duplex oligonucleotide" of the present invention can
be composed of double-stranded RNA (dsRNA), a DNA-RNA hybrid, single-
stranded RNA (ssRNA), isolated RNA (i.e., partially purified RNA, essentially
pure RNA), synthetic RNA and recombinantly produced RNA.

Preferably, the specific small interfering duplex oligonucleotide of the
20 present invention is an oligoribonucleotide composed mainly of ribonucleic
acids.

Instructions for generation of duplex oligonucleotides capable of
mediating RNA interference are provided in www.ambion.com.

Hence, the small interfering polynucleotide molecule according to the
25 present invention can be an RNAi molecule (RNA interference molecule).

Alternatively, a small interfering polynucleotide molecule can be an
oligonucleotide such as a CD38-specific antisense molecule or a ribozyme
molecule, further described hereinunder.

Oligonucleotides designed according to the teachings of the present
30 invention can be generated according to any oligonucleotide synthesis method

known in the art such as enzymatic synthesis or solid phase synthesis. Equipment and reagents for executing solid-phase synthesis are commercially available from, for example, Applied Biosystems. Any other means for such synthesis may also be employed; the actual synthesis of the oligonucleotides is well within the capabilities of one skilled in the art.

Oligonucleotides used according to this embodiment of the present invention are those having a length selected from a range of 10 to about 200 bases preferably 15-150 bases, more preferably 20-100 bases, most preferably 20-50 bases.

The oligonucleotides of the present invention may comprise heterocyclic nucleosides consisting of purines and the pyrimidines bases, bonded in a 3' to 5' phosphodiester linkage.

Preferably used oligonucleotides are those modified in either backbone, internucleoside linkages or bases, as is broadly described hereinunder. Such modifications can oftentimes facilitate oligonucleotide uptake and resistivity to intracellular conditions.

Specific examples of preferred oligonucleotides useful according to this aspect of the present invention include oligonucleotides containing modified backbones or non-natural internucleoside linkages. Oligonucleotides having modified backbones include those that retain a phosphorus atom in the backbone, as disclosed in U.S. Patents Nos.: ,687,808; 4,469,863; 4,476,301; 5,023,243; 5,177,196; 5,188,897; 5,264,423; 5,276,019; 5,278,302; 5,286,717; 5,321,131; 5,399,676; 5,405,939; 5,453,496; 5,455,233; 5,466, 677; 5,476,925; 5,519,126; 5,536,821; 5,541,306; 5,550,111; 5,563,253; 5,571,799; 5,587,361; and 5,625,050.

Preferred modified oligonucleotide backbones include, for example, phosphorothioates, chiral phosphorothioates, phosphorodithioates, phosphotriesters, aminoalkyl phosphotriesters, methyl and other alkyl phosphonates including 3'-alkylene phosphonates and chiral phosphonates, phosphinates, phosphoramidates including 3'-amino phosphoramidate and

aminoalkylphosphoramidates, thionophosphoramidates, thionoalkylphosphonates, thionoalkylphosphotriesters, and boranophosphates having normal 3'-5' linkages, 2'-5' linked analogs of these, and those having inverted polarity wherein the adjacent pairs of nucleoside units are linked 3'-5' to 5'-3' or 2'-5' to 5'-2'. Various salts, mixed salts and free acid forms can also be used.

Alternatively, modified oligonucleotide backbones that do not include a phosphorus atom therein have backbones that are formed by short chain alkyl or cycloalkyl internucleoside linkages, mixed heteroatom and alkyl or cycloalkyl internucleoside linkages, or one or more short chain heteroatomic or heterocyclic internucleoside linkages. These include those having morpholino linkages (formed in part from the sugar portion of a nucleoside); siloxane backbones; sulfide, sulfoxide and sulfone backbones; formacetyl and thioformacetyl backbones; methylene formacetyl and thioformacetyl backbones; alkene containing backbones; sulfamate backbones; methyleneimino and methylenehydrazino backbones; sulfonate and sulfonamide backbones; amide backbones; and others having mixed N, O, S and CH₂ component parts, as disclosed in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,034,506; 5,166,315; 5,185,444; 5,214,134; 5,216,141; 5,235,033; 5,264,562; 5,264,564; 5,405,938; 5,434,257; 5,466,677; 5,470,967; 5,489,677; 5,541,307; 5,561,225; 5,596,086; 5,602,240; 5,610,289; 5,602,240; 5,608,046; 5,610,289; 5,618,704; 5,623,070; 5,663,312; 5,633,360; 5,677,437; and 5,677,439.

Other oligonucleotides which can be used according to the present invention, are those modified in both sugar and the internucleoside linkage, i.e., the backbone, of the nucleotide units are replaced with novel groups. The base units are maintained for complementation with the appropriate polynucleotide target. An example for such an oligonucleotide mimetic, includes peptide nucleic acid (PNA). A PNA oligonucleotide refers to an oligonucleotide where the sugar-backbone is replaced with an amide containing backbone, in particular an aminoethylglycine backbone. The bases are retained and are bound

directly or indirectly to aza nitrogen atoms of the amide portion of the backbone. United States patents that teach the preparation of PNA compounds include, but are not limited to, U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,539,082; 5,714,331; and 5,719,262, each of which is herein incorporated by reference. Other backbone
5 modifications, which can be used in the present invention are disclosed in U.S. Pat. No: 6,303,374. Oligonucleotides of the present invention may also include base modifications or substitutions. As used herein, "unmodified" or "natural" bases include the purine bases adenine (A) and guanine (G), and the pyrimidine bases thymine (T), cytosine (C) and uracil (U). Modified bases include but are
10 not limited to other synthetic and natural bases such as 5-methylcytosine (5-me-C), 5-hydroxymethyl cytosine, xanthine, hypoxanthine, 2-aminoadenine, 6-methyl and other alkyl derivatives of adenine and guanine, 2-propyl and other alkyl derivatives of adenine and guanine, 2-thiouracil, 2-thiothymine and 2-thiocytosine, 5-halouracil and cytosine, 5-propynyl uracil and cytosine, 6-azo
15 uracil, cytosine and thymine, 5-uracil (pseudouracil), 4-thiouracil, 8-halo, 8-amino, 8-thiol, 8-thioalkyl, 8-hydroxyl and other 8-substituted adenines and guanines, 5-halo particularly 5-bromo, 5-trifluoromethyl and other 5-substituted uracils and cytosines, 7-methylguanine and 7-methyladenine, 8-azaguanine and 8-azaadenine, 7-deazaguanine and 7-deazaadenine and 3-deazaguanine and 3-deazaadenine. Further bases include those disclosed in U.S. Pat. No: 3,687,808,
20 those disclosed in The Concise Encyclopedia Of Polymer Science And Engineering, pages 858-859, Kroschwitz, J. I., ed. John Wiley & Sons, 1990, those disclosed by Englisch et al., Angewandte Chemie, International Edition, 1991, 30, 613, and those disclosed by Sanghvi, Y. S., Chapter 15, Antisense
25 Research and Applications, pages 289-302, Crooke, S. T. and Lebleu, B. , ed., CRC Press, 1993. Such bases are particularly useful for increasing the binding affinity of the oligomeric compounds of the invention. These include 5-substituted pyrimidines, 6-azapyrimidines and N-2, N-6 and O-6 substituted purines, including 2-aminopropyladenine, 5-propynyluracil and 5-propynylcytosine. 5-methylcytosine substitutions have been shown to increase
30

nucleic acid duplex stability by 0.6-1.2 °C. [Sanghvi YS et al. (1993) Antisense Research and Applications, CRC Press, Boca Raton 276-278] and are presently preferred base substitutions, even more particularly when combined with 2'-O-methoxyethyl sugar modifications.

5 Another modification of the oligonucleotides of the invention involves chemically linking to the oligonucleotide one or more moieties or conjugates, which enhance the activity, cellular distribution or cellular uptake of the oligonucleotide. Such moieties include but are not limited to lipid moieties such as a cholesterol moiety, cholic acid, a thioether, e.g., hexyl-S-tritylthiol, a
10 thiocholesterol, an aliphatic chain, e.g., dodecandiol or undecyl residues, a phospholipid, e.g., di-hexadecyl-rac-glycerol or triethylammonium 1,2-di-O-hexadecyl-rac-glycero-3-H-phosphonate, a polyamine or a polyethylene glycol chain, or adamantane acetic acid, a palmityl moiety, or an octadecylamine or hexylamino-carbonyl-oxycholesterol moiety, as disclosed in U.S. Pat. No:
15 6,303,374.

It is not necessary for all positions in a given oligonucleotide molecule to be uniformly modified, and in fact more than one of the aforementioned modifications may be incorporated in a single compound or even at a single nucleoside within an oligonucleotide.

20 As described hereinabove, the oligonucleotides of the present invention are preferably antisense molecules, which are chimeric molecules. "Chimeric antisense molecules" are oligonucleotides, which contain two or more chemically distinct regions, each made up of at least one nucleotide. These oligonucleotides typically contain at least one region wherein the
25 oligonucleotide is modified so as to confer upon the oligonucleotide increased resistance to nuclease degradation, increased cellular uptake, and/or increased binding affinity for the target polynucleotide. An additional region of the oligonucleotide may serve as a substrate for enzymes capable of cleaving RNA:DNA or RNA:RNA hybrids. An example for such includes RNase H,
30 which is a cellular endonuclease which cleaves the RNA strand of an

RNA:DNA duplex. Activation of RNase H, therefore, results in cleavage of the RNA target, thereby greatly enhancing the efficiency of oligonucleotide inhibition of gene expression. Consequently, comparable results can often be obtained with shorter oligonucleotides when chimeric oligonucleotides are
5 used, compared to phosphorothioate deoxyoligonucleotides hybridizing to the same target region. Cleavage of the RNA target can be routinely detected by gel electrophoresis and, if necessary, associated nucleic acid hybridization techniques known in the art.

Chimeric antisense molecules of the present invention may be formed as
10 composite structures of two or more oligonucleotides, modified oligonucleotides, as described above. Representative U.S. patents that teach the preparation of such hybrid structures include, but are not limited to, U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,013,830; 5,149,797; 5,220,007; 5,256,775; 5,366,878; 5,403,711; 5,491,133; 5,565,350; 5,623,065; 5,652,355; 5,652,356; and 5,700,922, each of
15 which is herein fully incorporated by reference.

The oligonucleotides of the present invention can further comprise a ribozyme sequence. Ribozymes are being increasingly used for the sequence-specific inhibition of gene expression by the cleavage of mRNAs. Several ribozyme sequences can be fused to the oligonucleotides of the present
20 invention. These sequences include but are not limited to ANGIOZYME specifically inhibiting formation of the VEGF-R (Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor receptor), a key component in the angiogenesis pathway, and HEPTAZYME, a ribozyme designed to selectively destroy Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) RNA, (Ribozyme Pharmaceuticals, Incorporated - WEB home page).

25 Further alternatively, a small interfering polynucleotide molecule, according to the present invention can be a DNAzyme.

DNAzymes are single-stranded catalytic nucleic acid molecules. A general model (the "10-23" model) for the DNAzyme has been proposed. "10-23" DNAzymes have a catalytic domain of 15 deoxyribonucleotides, flanked by
30 two substrate-recognition domains of seven to nine deoxyribonucleotides each.

This type of DNAzyme can effectively cleave its substrate RNA at purine:pyrimidine junctions (Santoro, S.W. & Joyce, G.F. Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA 199; for rev of DNAzymes see Khachigian, LM Curr Opin Mol Ther 2002;4:119-21).

5 Examples of construction and amplification of synthetic, engineered DNAzymes recognizing single and double-stranded target cleavage sites have been disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 6,326,174 to Joyce et al. DNAzymes of similar design directed against the human Urokinase receptor were recently observed to inhibit Urokinase receptor expression, and successfully inhibit colon cancer cell
10 metastasis in vivo (Itoh et al , 20002, Abstract 409, Ann Meeting Am Soc Gen Ther www.asgt.org). In another application, DNAzymes complementary to bcr-abl oncogenes were successful in inhibiting the oncogenes expression in leukemia cells, and lessening relapse rates in autologous bone marrow transplant in cases of CML and ALL.

15 Alternatively, as described hereinabove, retinoid receptor superfamily inhibitors (e.g., antagonists, siRNA molecules, antisense molecules, antibodies, etc.) which downregulate or suppress retinoid receptor activity and/or expression can be used to down regulate CD38 expression.

Briefly, as is described hereinabove, retinoid receptors such as RAR,
20 RXR and VDR have been reported to be involved in the regulation of gene expression pathways associated with cell proliferation and differentiation and in particular in the regulation of CD38 expression (24, 25). Hence, preferred agents that downregulate CD38 expression according to the present invention include RAR antagonists, RXR antagonists and VDR antagonists or,
25 alternatively, antagonists for reducing the capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoid and/or Vitamin D.

As used herein the term "antagonist" refers to an agent that counteracts or abrogates the effects of an agonist or a natural ligand of a receptor. Further features relating to such antagonists are detailed hereinunder.

30 Each of the agents described hereinabove may reduce the expression or

activity of CD38 individually. However, the present invention aims to also encompass the use of any subcombination of these agents.

It will be appreciated that protein agents (e.g., antibodies) of the present invention can be expressed from a polynucleotide encoding same and provided to *ex-vivo* cultured stem cells employing an appropriate gene
5 delivery vehicle/method and a nucleic acid construct as is further described hereinunder.

Examples of suitable constructs include, but are not limited to pcDNA3, pcDNA3.1 (+/-), pGL3, PzeoSV2 (+/-), pDisplay, pEF/myc/cyto,
10 pCMV/myc/cyto each of which is commercially available from Invitrogen Co. (www.invitrogen.com). Examples of retroviral vector and packaging systems are those sold by Clontech, San Diego, Calif., including Retro-X vectors pLNCX and pLXSN, which permit cloning into multiple cloning sites and the transgene is transcribed from CMV promoter. Vectors derived from Mo-
15 MuLV are also included such as pBabe, where the transgene will be transcribed from the 5'LTR promoter.

As the method of *ex-vivo* expanding a population of stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*, according to this aspect of the present invention, is effected by modulating
20 CD38 expression and/or activity, either at the protein level, using RAR, RXR or VDR antagonists or a CD38 inhibitor such as nicotinamide and analogs thereof, or at the expression level via genetic engineering techniques, as is detailed hereinabove, there are further provided, according to the present invention, several preferred methods of *ex-vivo* expanding a population of stem
25 cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*.

In one particular, a method of *ex-vivo* expanding a population of stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo* is effected by providing the stem cells with *ex-vivo* culture
30 conditions for *ex-vivo* cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a

capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D, thereby expanding the population of stem cells while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*.

Reducing the capacity of the cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D, or to retinoic acid, retinoid X and/or Vitamin D receptor signaling may be effected, for example, by the administration of chemical inhibitors, including receptor antagonists.

In another particular, the method of *ex-vivo* expanding a population of stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo* is effected by providing the stem cells with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for *ex-vivo* cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to signaling pathways involving the retinoic acid receptor, retinoid-X receptor and/or Vitamin D receptor, thereby expanding the population of stem cells while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*.

Reducing the capacity of the cells to respond to retinoic acid, retinoid X and/or Vitamin D receptor signaling events, includes treating the cells with antagonists supplied continuously or for a short-pulse period, and is effected by a diminution or abrogation of cellular signaling pathways through their respective, cognate receptors.

Final concentrations of the antagonists may be, depending on the specific application, in the micromolar or millimolar ranges. For example, within about 0.1 μM to about 100 mM, preferably within about 4 μM to about 50 mM, more preferably within about 5 μM to about 40 mM.

In still another particular, the method of *ex-vivo* expanding a population of stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo* is effected by providing the stem cells with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for *ex-vivo* cell proliferation and with nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative or a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite, thereby expanding the

population of stem cells while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*.

Final concentrations of the nicotinamide or the analogs, derivatives or metabolites thereof are preferably, depending on the specific application, in the millimolar ranges. For example, within about 0.1 mM to about 20 mM, preferably within about 1 mM to about 10 mM, more preferably within about 5 mM to about 10 mM.

The *ex-vivo* expansion of populations of stem cells, according to the features described hereinabove, can be utilized for expanding a population of hematopoietic renewable stem cells *ex-vivo*.

Hence, according to another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of *ex-vivo* expanding a population of hematopoietic renewable stem cells *ex-vivo*. The method is effected by obtaining adult or neonatal umbilical cord whole white blood cells (also known in the art as mononuclear cell fraction) or whole bone marrow cells sample and providing the cells in the sample with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for stem cells *ex-vivo* cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing the expression and/or activity of CD38, as is described hereinabove, thereby expanding a population of a renewable stem cells in the sample.

In one particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, this method is effected by obtaining adult or neonatal umbilical cord whole white blood cells or whole bone marrow cells sample and providing the cells in the sample with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for stem cells *ex-vivo* cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D, thereby expanding a population of a renewable stem cells in the sample.

In another particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the method is effected by obtaining adult or neonatal umbilical cord whole white blood cells or whole bone marrow cells sample and providing the cells in the sample with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for stem cells *ex-vivo* cell

proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to signaling pathways involving the retinoic acid receptor, the retinoid X receptor and/or the Vitamin D receptor, thereby expanding a population of a renewable stem cells in the sample.

5 In still another particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the method is effected by obtaining adult or neonatal umbilical cord whole white blood cells or whole bone marrow cells sample and providing the cells in the sample with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for stem cells *ex-vivo* cell proliferation and with nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a
10 nicotinamide analog derivative or a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite, thereby expanding a population of a renewable stem cells in the sample.

 Expanding the population of stem cells can be further utilized, according to the present invention, in *in vivo* settings, such that according to still another
15 aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of *in-vivo* expanding a population of stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *in-vivo*. The method, according to this aspect of the present invention is effected by administering to a subject in need thereof a therapeutically effective amount of an agent, the agent serves for reducing an
20 expression and/or activity of CD38, according to the features described hereinabove.

 In one particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the method is effected by administering to a subject in need thereof a therapeutically effective amount of an agent, which serves for reducing a
25 capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D, as is defined hereinabove.

 In another particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the method is effected by administering to a subject in need thereof a therapeutically effective amount of an agent, which serves for reducing a
30 capacity of the stem cells in responding to signaling pathways involving the

retinoic acid receptor, retinoid-X receptor and/or Vitamin D receptor, as is defined hereinabove.

In still another particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the method is effected by administering to a subject in need thereof a therapeutically effective amount of an agent selected from the group consisting of nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative and a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite.

As used herein throughout, the phrase "therapeutically effective amount" or "effective amount" refers to that amount of the agent being administered which will induce expansion of stem cells yet will limit the differentiation thereof.

The methods described hereinabove for *ex-vivo* expanding stem cells populations can result, *inter alia*, in an expanded population of stem cells.

Thus, further according to an aspect of the present invention there is provided an *ex-vivo* expanded population of hematopoietic stem cells which comprises a plurality of cells characterized by 3-20 % of the cells being reselectable CD34⁺ cells, of which at least 40 % of cells are CD34⁺_{dim}, i.e., fall below the median intensity in a FACS analysis, wherein, in the reselectable CD34⁺ cells, a majority of cells which are Lin⁻ are also CD34⁺_{dim} cells. In one embodiment, the hematopoietic stem cells are derived from a source selected from the group consisting of bone marrow, peripheral blood and neonatal umbilical cord blood. In another embodiment, the population of cells has a single genetic background. In yet another embodiment, the *ex-vivo* expanded population of hematopoietic stem cells comprises at least N cells derived from a single donor, wherein N equals the average number of CD34⁺ cells derived from one sample of neonatal umbilical cord blood, bone marrow, or peripheral blood multiplied by 1,000. Cell surface expression of the CD34 and/or Lin markers can be determined, for example, via FACS analysis or immunohistological staining techniques. A self renewal potential of the stem cells can be determined in-vitro by long term colony formation (LTC-CFUc), as

is further exemplified in the Examples section that follows, or by *in-vivo* engraftment in the SCID-Hu mouse model. The SCID-Hu mouse model employs C.B-17 scid/scid (SCID) mice transplanted with human fetal thymus and liver tissue or fetal BM tissue and provides an appropriate model for the evaluation of putative human hematopoietic stem cells. Because of the reconstitution of the SCID mice with human fetal tissue, the model affords the proliferation of stem cells, in this case human hematopoietic stem cells to proliferate, and function in the hematopoietic microenvironment of human origin. Mice are typically irradiated, then delivered stem cells into the grafts, and reconstitution is measured by any number of methods, including FACS and immunohistochemistry of repopulated organs (Humeau L., et al Blood (1997) 90:3496).

Additionally, the methods described hereinabove can be utilized to produce transplantable hematopoietic cell preparations, such that according to yet another aspect of the present invention there is provided a transplantable hematopoietic cell preparation, which comprises an expanded population of hematopoietic stem cells propagated *ex-vivo* in the presence of an effective amount of an agent, which reduces the expression and/or activity of CD38, as described hereinabove, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier. Hence, cell populations of the invention can be administered in a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier or diluent, such as sterile saline and aqueous buffer solutions. The use of such carriers and diluents is well known in the art.

In a particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the transplantable hematopoietic cell preparation comprises an expanded population of hematopoietic stem cells propagated *ex-vivo* in the presence of an effective amount of an agent, which reduces a capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D, while at the same time, substantially

inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

In another particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the transplantable hematopoietic cell preparation comprises an expanded
5 population of hematopoietic stem cells propagated *ex-vivo* in the presence of an effective amount of an agent, which reduces a capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid receptor, retinoid X receptor and/or Vitamin D receptor signaling, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

10 In still another particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the transplantable hematopoietic cell preparation comprises an expanded population of hematopoietic stem cells propagated *ex-vivo* in the presence of an effective amount of an agent selected from the group consisting of nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide
15 analog derivative and a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite; and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

The ability of the agents of the present invention to inhibit differentiation of stem cells can be further used in various technical applications:

20 According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of preserving stem cells. In one embodiment, the method is effected by handling the stem cell in at least one of the following steps: harvest, isolation and/or storage, in a presence of an effective amount of a retinoic acid receptor antagonist, a retinoid X receptor antagonist and/or a Vitamin D receptor
25 antagonist. Alternatively, the method is effected by handling the stem cell in at least one of the following steps: harvest, isolation and/or storage, in a presence of an effective amount of nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative or a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite.

According to still a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a cells collection/culturing bag. The cells collection/culturing bag of the present invention is supplemented with an effective amount of a retinoic acid receptor antagonist, a retinoid X receptor antagonist and/or a Vitamin D receptor antagonist, which substantially inhibits cell differentiation. Alternatively, the cells collection/culturing bag of the present invention is supplemented with an effective amount of nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative or a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite.

According to the present invention there is also provided a cells separation and/or washing buffer. The separation and/or washing buffer is supplemented with an effective amount of a retinoic acid receptor antagonist, a retinoid X receptor antagonist and/or Vitamin D receptor antagonists, which substantially inhibit cell differentiation and induce cell expansion. Alternatively, the separation and/or washing buffer is supplemented with an effective amount of nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative or a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite.

As is further detailed below, stem cells may serve to exert cellular gene therapy.

Gene therapy as used herein refers to the transfer of genetic material (e.g., DNA or RNA) of interest into a host to treat or prevent a genetic or acquired disease or condition or phenotype. The genetic material of interest encodes a product (e.g., a protein, polypeptide, peptide, functional RNA, antisense) whose production *in vivo* is desired. For example, the genetic material of interest can encode a hormone, receptor, enzyme, polypeptide or peptide of therapeutic value. For review see, in general, the text "Gene Therapy" (Advanced in Pharmacology 40, Academic Press, 1997).

Two basic approaches to gene therapy have evolved: (i) ex-vivo or cellular gene therapy; and (ii) *in vivo* gene therapy. In ex-vivo gene therapy

cells are removed from a patient, and while being cultured are treated in-vitro. Generally, a functional replacement gene is introduced into the cells via an appropriate gene delivery vehicle/method (transfection, transduction, homologous recombination, etc.) and an expression system as needed and then
5 the modified cells are expanded in culture and returned to the host/patient. These genetically re-implanted cells have been shown to express the transfected genetic material in situ.

Hence, further according to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of genetically modifying stem cells with an exogene. The
10 method, according to this aspect of the present invention, is effected by (a) obtaining stem cells to be genetically modified; (b) providing the stem cells with ex-vivo culture conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing an expression and/or activity of CD38, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting
15 differentiation of the stem cells ex-vivo; and (c) genetically modifying the stem cells with the exogene. It is clear that the order of step (b) and (c) can be reversed.

In a particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the method is effected by (a) obtaining stem cells to be genetically modified; (b)
20 providing the stem cells with ex-vivo culture conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells ex-vivo; and (c) genetically modifying the stem cells with the
25 exogene.

In another particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the method is effected by (a) obtaining stem cells to be genetically modified; (b) providing the stem cells with ex-vivo culture conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to
30 signaling pathways involving the retinoic acid receptor and/or the retinoid X

receptor and/or the Vitamin D receptor, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells ex-vivo; and (c) genetically modifying the stem cells with the exogene. In still another particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the method is effected by (a) obtaining stem cells to be genetically modified; (b) providing the stem cells with ex-vivo culture conditions for cell proliferation and with nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative or a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells ex-vivo; and (c) genetically modifying the stem cells with the exogene.

In a preferred embodiment, genetically modifying the cells is effected by a vector, which comprises the exogene or transgene, which vector is, for example, a viral vector or a nucleic acid vector. Many viral vectors suitable for use in cellular gene therapy are known, examples are provided hereinbelow. Similarly, a range of nucleic acid vectors can be used to genetically transform the expanded cells of the invention, as is further described below.

Accordingly, the expanded cells of the present invention can be modified to express a gene product. As used herein, the phrase "gene product" refers to proteins, peptides and functional RNA molecules. Generally, the gene product encoded by the nucleic acid molecule is the desired gene product to be supplied to a subject. Examples of such gene products include proteins, peptides, glycoproteins and lipoproteins normally produced by an organ of the recipient subject. For example, gene products which may be supplied by way of gene replacement to defective organs in the pancreas include insulin, amylase, protease, lipase, trypsinogen, chymotrypsinogen, carboxypeptidase, ribonuclease, deoxyribonuclease, triacylglycerol lipase, phospholipase A₂, elastase, and amylase; gene products normally produced by the liver include blood clotting factors such as blood clotting Factor VIII and Factor IX, UDP glucuronyl transferase, ornithine transcarbamoylase, and cytochrome p450

enzymes, and adenosine deaminase, for the processing of serum adenosine or the endocytosis of low density lipoproteins; gene products produced by the thymus include serum thymic factor, thymic humoral factor, thymopoietin, and thymosin α_1 ; gene products produced by the digestive tract cells include
5 gastrin, secretin, cholecystokinin, somatostatin, serotonin, and substance P.

Alternatively, the encoded gene product is one, which induces the expression of the desired gene product by the cell (e.g., the introduced genetic material encodes a transcription factor, which induces the transcription of the gene product to be supplied to the subject).

10 In still another embodiment, the recombinant gene can provide a heterologous protein, e.g., not native to the cell in which it is expressed. For instance, various human MHC components can be provided to non-human cells to support engraftment in a human recipient. Alternatively, the transgene is one, which inhibits the expression or action of a donor MHC gene product
15 normally expressed in the micro-organ explant.

A nucleic acid molecule introduced into a cell is in a form suitable for expression in the cell of the gene product encoded by the nucleic acid. Accordingly, the nucleic acid molecule includes coding and regulatory sequences required for transcription of a gene (or portion thereof) and, when the
20 gene product is a protein or peptide, translation of the gene acid molecule include promoters, enhancers and polyadenylation signals, as well as sequences necessary for transport of an encoded protein or peptide, for example N-terminal signal sequences for transport of proteins or peptides to the surface of the cell or secretion.

25 Nucleotide sequences which regulate expression of a gene product (e.g., promoter and enhancer sequences) are selected based upon the type of cell in which the gene product is to be expressed and the desired level of expression of the gene product. For example, a promoter known to confer cell-type specific expression of a gene linked to the promoter can be used. A promoter specific
30 for myoblast gene expression can be linked to a gene of interest to confer

muscle-specific expression of that gene product. Muscle-specific regulatory elements, which are known in the art, include upstream regions from the dystrophin gene (Klamut et al., (1989) *Mol. Cell Biol.* 9: 2396), the creatine kinase gene (Buskin and Hauschka, (1989) *Mol. Cell Biol.* 9: 2627) and the troponin gene (Mar and Ordahl, (1988) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA.* 85: 6404).
5 Regulatory elements specific for other cell types are known in the art (e.g., the albumin enhancer for liver-specific expression; insulin regulatory elements for pancreatic islet cell-specific expression; various neural cell-specific regulatory elements, including neural dystrophin, neural enolase and A4 amyloid
10 promoters).

Alternatively, a regulatory element, which can direct constitutive expression of a gene in a variety of different cell types, such as a viral regulatory element, can be used. Examples of viral promoters commonly used to drive gene expression include those derived from polyoma virus, Adenovirus
15 2, cytomegalovirus and Simian Virus 40, and retroviral LTRs.

Alternatively, a regulatory element, which provides inducible expression of a gene linked thereto, can be used. The use of an inducible regulatory element (e.g., an inducible promoter) allows for modulation of the production of the gene product in the cell. Examples of potentially useful inducible
20 regulatory systems for use in eukaryotic cells include hormone-regulated elements (e.g., see Mader, S. and White, J.H. (1993) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 90: 5603-5607), synthetic ligand-regulated elements (see, e.g., Spencer, D.M. et al 1993) *Science* 262: 1019-1024) and ionizing radiation-regulated elements (e.g., see Manome, Y. Et al. (1993) *Biochemistry* 32: 10607-10613; Datta, R. et
25 al. (1992) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 89: 1014-10153). Additional tissue-specific or inducible regulatory systems, which may be developed, can also be used in accordance with the invention.

There are a number of techniques known in the art for introducing genetic material into a cell that can be applied to modify a cell of the invention.

In one embodiment, the nucleic acid is in the form of a naked nucleic acid molecule. In this situation, the nucleic acid molecule introduced into a cell to be modified consists only of the nucleic acid encoding the gene product and the necessary regulatory elements.

5 Alternatively, the nucleic acid encoding the gene product (including the necessary regulatory elements) is contained within a plasmid vector. Examples of plasmid expression vectors include CDM8 (Seed, B. (1987) *Nature* 329: 840) and pMT2PC (Kaufman, et al. (1987) *EMBO J.* 6: 187-195).

10 In another embodiment, the nucleic acid molecule to be introduced into a cell is contained within a viral vector. In this situation, the nucleic acid encoding the gene product is inserted into the viral genome (or partial viral genome). The regulatory elements directing the expression of the gene product can be included with the nucleic acid inserted into the viral genome (i.e., linked to the gene inserted into the viral genome) or can be provided by the viral
15 genome itself.

Naked nucleic acids can be introduced into cells using calcium-phosphate mediated transfection, DEAE-dextran mediated transfection, electroporation, liposome-mediated transfection, direct injection, and receptor-mediated uptake.

20 Naked nucleic acid, e.g., DNA, can be introduced into cells by forming a precipitate containing the nucleic acid and calcium phosphate. For example, a HEPES-buffered saline solution can be mixed with a solution containing calcium chloride and nucleic acid to form a precipitate and the precipitate is then incubated with cells. A glycerol or dimethyl sulfoxide shock step can be
25 added to increase the amount of nucleic acid taken up by certain cells. CaPO₄-mediated transfection can be used to stably (or transiently) transfect cells and is only applicable to *in vitro* modification of cells. Protocols for CaPO₄-mediated transfection can be found in Current Protocols in Molecular Biology, Ausubel, F.M. et al. (eds.) Greene Publishing Associates, (1989), Section 9.1 and in
30 Molecular Cloning: A Laboratory Manual, 2nd Edition, Sambrook et al. Cold

Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, (1989), Sections 16.32-16.40 or other standard laboratory manuals.

Naked nucleic acid can be introduced into cells by forming a mixture of the nucleic acid and DEAE-dextran and incubating the mixture with the cells. A
5 dimethylsulfoxide or chloroquine shock step can be added to increase the amount of nucleic acid uptake. DEAE-dextran transfection is only applicable to *in vitro* modification of cells and can be used to introduce DNA transiently into cells but is not preferred for creating stably transfected cells. Thus, this method can be used for short-term production of a gene product but is not a method of
10 choice for long-term production of a gene product. Protocols for DEAE-dextran-mediated transfection can be found in Current Protocols in Molecular Biology, Ausubel, F.M. et al. (eds.) Greene Publishing Associates (1989), Section 9.2 and in Molecular Cloning: A Laboratory Manual, 2nd Edition, Sambrook et al. Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, (1989), Sections 16.41-
15 16.46 or other standard laboratory manuals.

Naked nucleic acid can also be introduced into cells by incubating the cells and the nucleic acid together in an appropriate buffer and subjecting the cells to a high-voltage electric pulse. The efficiency with which nucleic acid is introduced into cells by electroporation is influenced by the strength of the
20 applied field, the length of the electric pulse, the temperature, the conformation and concentration of the DNA and the ionic composition of the media. Electroporation can be used to stably (or transiently) transfect a wide variety of cell types and is only applicable to *in vitro* modification of cells. Protocols for electroporating cells can be found in Current Protocols in Molecular Biology,
25 Ausubel F.M. et al. (eds.) Greene Publishing Associates, (1989), Section 9.3 and in Molecular Cloning: A Laboratory Manual, 2nd Edition, Sambrook et al. Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, (1989), Sections 16.54-16.55 or other standard laboratory manuals.

Another method by which naked nucleic acid can be introduced into
30 cells includes liposome-mediated transfection (lipofection). The nucleic acid is

mixed with a liposome suspension containing cationic lipids. The DNA/liposome complex is then incubated with cells. Liposome mediated transfection can be used to stably (or transiently) transfect cells in culture *in vitro*. Protocols can be found in Current Protocols in Molecular Biology, Ausubel F.M. et al. (eds.) Greene Publishing Associates, (1989), Section 9.4 and other standard laboratory manuals. Additionally, gene delivery *in vivo* has been accomplished using liposomes. See for example Nicolau et al. (1987) *Meth. Enz.* 149:157-176; Wang and Huang (1987) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 84:7851-7855; Brigham et al. (1989) *Am. J Med. Sci.* 298:278; and Gould-Fogerite et al. (1989) *Gene* 84:429-438.

Naked nucleic acid can also be introduced into cells by directly injecting the nucleic acid into the cells. For an *in vitro* culture of cells, DNA can be introduced by microinjection. Since each cell is microinjected individually, this approach is very labor intensive when modifying large numbers of cells. However, a situation wherein microinjection is a method of choice is in the production of transgenic animals (discussed in greater detail below). In this situation, the DNA is stably introduced into a fertilized oocyte, which is then allowed to develop into an animal. The resultant animal contains cells carrying the DNA introduced into the oocyte. Direct injection has also been used to introduce naked DNA into cells *in vivo* (see e.g., Acsadi et al. (1991) *Nature* 332:815-818; Wolff et al. (1990) *Science* 247:1465-1468). A delivery apparatus (e.g., a "gene gun") for injecting DNA into cells *in vivo* can be used. Such an apparatus is commercially available (e.g., from BioRad).

Naked nucleic acid can be complexed to a cation, such as polylysine, which is coupled to a ligand for a cell-surface receptor to be taken up by receptor-mediated endocytosis (see for example Wu, G. and Wu, C.H. (1988) *J. Biol. Chem.* 263: 14621; Wilson et al. (1992) *J. Biol. Chem.* 267: 963-967; and U.S. Patent No. 5,166,320). Binding of the nucleic acid-ligand complex to the receptor facilitates uptake of the DNA by receptor-mediated endocytosis. Receptors to which a DNA-ligand complex has targeted include the transferrin

receptor and the asialoglycoprotein receptor. A DNA-ligand complex linked to adenovirus capsids which naturally disrupt endosomes, thereby releasing material into the cytoplasm can be used to avoid degradation of the complex by intracellular lysosomes (see for example Curiel et al. (1991) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 88: 8850; Cristiano et al. (1993) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 90: 2122-2126). Receptor-mediated DNA uptake can be used to introduce DNA into cells either *in vitro* or *in vivo* and, additionally, has the added feature that DNA can be selectively targeted to a particular cell type by use of a ligand which binds to a receptor selectively expressed on a target cell of interest.

Generally, when naked DNA is introduced into cells in culture (e.g., by one of the transfection techniques described above) only a small fraction of cells (about 1 out of 10^5) typically integrate the transfected DNA into their genomes (i.e., the DNA is maintained in the cell episomally). Thus, in order to identify cells, which have taken up exogenous DNA, it is advantageous to transfect nucleic acid encoding a selectable marker into the cell along with the nucleic acid(s) of interest. Preferred selectable markers include those, which confer resistance to drugs such as G418, hygromycin and methotrexate. Selectable markers may be introduced on the same plasmid as the gene(s) of interest or may be introduced on a separate plasmid.

A preferred approach for introducing nucleic acid encoding a gene product into a cell is by use of a viral vector containing nucleic acid, e.g., a cDNA, encoding the gene product. Infection of cells with a viral vector has the advantage that a large proportion of cells receive the nucleic acid which can obviate the need for selection of cells which have received the nucleic acid. Additionally, molecules encoded within the viral vector, e.g., a cDNA contained in the viral vector, are expressed efficiently in cells which have taken up viral vector nucleic acid and viral vector systems can be used either *in vitro* or *in vivo*.

Defective retroviruses are well characterized for use in gene transfer for gene therapy purposes (for review see Miller, A.D. (1990) *Blood* 76: 271). A

recombinant retrovirus can be constructed having a nucleic acid encoding a gene product of interest inserted into the retroviral genome. Additionally, portions of the retroviral genome can be removed to render the retrovirus replication defective. The replication defective retrovirus is then packaged into virions, which can be used to infect a target cell through the use of a helper virus by standard techniques. Protocols for producing recombinant retroviruses and for infecting cells *in vitro* or *in vivo* with such viruses can be found in Current Protocols in Molecular Biology, Ausubel, F.M. et al. (eds.) Greene Publishing Associates, (1989), Sections 9.10-9.14 and other standard laboratory manuals. Examples of suitable retroviruses include pLJ, pZIP, pWE and pEM, which are well known to those skilled in the art. Examples of suitable packaging virus lines include ψ Crip, ψ Crip, ψ 2 and ψ Am. Retroviruses have been used to introduce a variety of genes into many different cell types, including epithelial cells endothelial cells, lymphocytes, myoblasts, hepatocytes, bone marrow cells, *in vitro* and/or *in vivo* (see for example Eglitis, et al. (1985) *Science* 230: 1395-1398; Danos and Mulligan (1988) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 85: 6460-6464; Wilson et al. (1988) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 85:3014-3018; Armentano et al., (1990) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 87: 6141-6145; Huber et al. (1991) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 88: 8039-8043; Feri et al. (1991) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 88:8377-8381; Chowdhury et al. (1991) *Science* 254: 1802-1805; van Beusechem et al. (1992) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 89:7640-7644; Kay et al. (1992) *Human Gene Therapy* 3:641-647; Dai et al. (1992) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 89:10892-10895; Hwu et al (1993) *J. Immunol.* 150:4104-4115; US Patent No. 4,868,116; US Patent No. 4,980,286; PCT Application WO 89/07136; PCT Application WO 89/02468; PCT Application WO 89/05345; and PCT Application WO 92/07573). Retroviral vectors require target cell division in order for the retroviral genome (and foreign nucleic acid inserted into it) to be integrated into the host genome to stably introduce nucleic acid into the cell. Thus, it may be necessary to stimulate replication of the target cell.

The genome of an adenovirus can be manipulated such that it encodes and expresses a gene product of interest but is inactivated in terms of its ability to replicate in a normal lytic viral life cycle. See for example Berkner et al. (1988) *BioTechniques* 6:616; Rosenfeld et al. (1991) *Science* 252:431-434; and
 5 Rosenfeld et al. (1992) *Cell* 68:143-155. Suitable adenoviral vectors derived from the adenovirus strain Ad type 5 dl324 or other strains of adenovirus (e.g., Ad2, Ad3, Ad7 etc.) are well known to those skilled in the art. Recombinant adenoviruses are advantageous in that they do not require dividing cells to be effective gene delivery vehicles and can be used to infect a wide variety of cell
 10 types, including airway epithelium (Rosenfeld et al. (1992) cited *supra*), endothelial cells (Lemarchand et al. (1992) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 89: 6482-6486), hepatocytes (Herz and Gerard (1993) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 90: 2812-2816) and muscle cells (Quantin et al. (1992) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 89: 2581-2584). Additionally, introduced adenoviral DNA (and foreign
 15 DNA contained therein) is not integrated into the genome of a host cell but remains episomal, thereby avoiding potential problems that can occur as a result of insertional mutagenesis in situations where introduced DNA becomes integrated into the host genome (e.g., retroviral DNA). Moreover, the carrying capacity of the adenoviral genome for foreign DNA is large (up to 8 kilobases)
 20 relative to other gene delivery vectors (Berkner et al. cited *supra*; Haj-Ahmand and Graham (1986) *J. Virol* 57: 267). Most replication-defective adenoviral vectors currently in use are deleted for all or parts of the viral E1 and E3 genes but retain as much as 80% of the adenoviral genetic material.

Adeno-associated virus (AAV) is a naturally occurring defective virus
 25 that requires another virus, such as an adenovirus or a herpes virus, as a helper virus for efficient replication and a productive life cycle. (For a review see Muzyczka et al. *Curr. Topics In Micro. And Immunol.* (1992) 158: 97-129). It is also one of the few viruses that may integrate its DNA into non-dividing cells, and exhibits a high frequency of stable integration (see for example Flotte et al.
 30 (1992) *Am. J. Respir. Cell. Mol. Biol.* 7: 349-356; Samulski et al. (1989) *J.*

Viol. 63:3822-3828; and McLaughlin et al (1989) *J. Virol.* 62: 1963-1973). Vectors containing as little as 300 base pairs of AAV can be packaged and can integrate. Space for exogenous DNA is limited to about 4.5 kb. An AAV vector such as that described in Tratschin et al. (1985) *Mol. Cell. Biol.* 5: 3251-3260
 5 can be used to introduce DNA into cells. A variety of nucleic acids have been introduced into different cell types using AAV vectors (see for example Hermonat et al. (1984) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 81: 6466-6470; Tratschin et al. (1985) *Mol. Cell Biol.* 4: 2072-2081; Wondisford et al. (1988) *Mol. Endocrinol.* 2:32-39; Tratschin et al. (1984) *J. Virol.* 51: 611-619; and Flotte et
 10 al. (1993) *J. Biol. Chem.* 268: 3781-3790).

The efficacy of a particular expression vector system and method of introducing nucleic acid into a cell can be assessed by standard approaches routinely used in the art. For example, DNA introduced into a cell can be detected by a filter hybridization technique (e.g., Southern blotting) and RNA
 15 produced by transcription of introduced DNA can be detected, for example, by Northern blotting, RNase protection or reverse transcriptase-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR). The gene product can be detected by an appropriate assay, for example by immunological detection of a produced protein, such as with a specific antibody, or by a functional assay to detect a functional activity of the
 20 gene product, such as an enzymatic assay. If the gene product of interest to be interest to be expressed by a cell is not readily assayable, an expression system can first be optimized using a reporter gene linked to the regulatory elements and vector to be used. The reporter gene encodes a gene product, which is easily detectable and, thus, can be used to evaluate efficacy of the system.
 25 Standard reporter genes used in the art include genes encoding β -galactosidase, chloramphenicol acetyl transferase, luciferase and human growth hormone.

When the method used to introduce nucleic acid into a population of cells results in modification of a large proportion of the cells and efficient expression of the gene product by the cells (e.g., as is often the case when using
 30 a viral expression vector), the modified population of cells may be used without

further isolation or subcloning of individual cells within the population. That is, there may be sufficient production of the gene product by the population of cells such that no further cell isolation is needed. Alternatively, it may be desirable to grow a homogenous population of identically modified cells from a single modified cell to isolate cells, which efficiently express the gene product. Such a population of uniform cells can be prepared by isolating a single modified cell by limiting dilution cloning followed by expanding the single cell in culture into a clonal population of cells by standard techniques.

As is discussed in detail hereinabove, *ex-vivo* expansion of stem cells can be advantageously utilized in hematopoietic cells transplantation or implantation. Hence, according to another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of hematopoietic cells transplantation or implantation. The method according to this aspect of the present invention is effected by (a) obtaining hematopoietic stem cells to be transplanted from a donor; (b) providing the stem cells with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing an expression and/or activity of CD38, thereby expanding the population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*; and (c) transplanting or implanting the stem cells to a recipient.

In a particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the method is effected by (a) obtaining hematopoietic stem cells to be transplanted from a donor; (b) providing the stem cells with *ex-vivo* culture conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D, thereby expanding the population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells *ex-vivo*; and (c) transplanting or implanting the stem cells to a recipient.

In another particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the method is effected by (a) obtaining hematopoietic stem cells to be transplanted from a donor; (b) providing the stem cells with *ex-vivo* culture

conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to signaling pathways involving the retinoic acid receptor, the retinoid X receptor and/or the Vitamin D receptor, thereby expanding the population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially
5 inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells ex-vivo; and (c) transplanting or implanting the stem cells to a recipient.

In still another particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the method is effected by (a) obtaining hematopoietic stem cells to be transplanted from a donor; (b) providing the stem cells with ex-vivo culture
10 conditions for cell proliferation and with nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative or a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite, thereby expanding the population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells ex-vivo; and (c) transplanting or implanting the stem cells to a recipient.

15 The donor and the recipient can be a single individual or different individuals, for example, allogeneic individuals. When allogeneic transplantation is practiced, regimes for reducing implant rejection and/or graft vs. host disease, as well known in the art, should be undertaken. Such regimes are currently practiced in human therapy. Most advanced regimes are disclosed
20 in publications by Slavin S. et al., e.g., J Clin Immunol (2002) 22: 64, and J Hematother Stem Cell Res (2002) 11: 265), Gur H. et al. (Blood (2002) 99: 4174), and Martelli MF et al, (Semin Hematol (2002) 39: 48), which are incorporated herein by reference.

According to yet another aspect of the present invention there is
25 provided a method of adoptive immunotherapy. The method according to this aspect of the present invention is effected by (a) obtaining hematopoietic stem cells from a recipient; (b) providing the stem cells with ex-vivo culture conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing an expression and/or activity of CD38, thereby expanding a population of the stem

cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and (c) transplanting the stem cells to the recipient.

In a particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the method is effected by (a) obtaining hematopoietic stem cells from a recipient; 5 (b) providing the stem cells with ex-vivo culture conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and (c) transplanting the stem cells to the recipient.

10 In another particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the method is effected by (a) obtaining hematopoietic stem cells from a recipient; (b) providing the stem cells with ex-vivo culture conditions for cell proliferation and, at the same time, for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to signaling pathways involving the retinoic acid receptor and/or the 15 retinoid X receptor and/or the Vitamin D receptor, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and (c) transplanting the stem cells to the recipient.

In still another particular embodiment of this aspect of the present 20 invention, the method is effected by (a) obtaining hematopoietic stem cells from a recipient; (b) providing the stem cells with ex-vivo culture conditions for cell proliferation and with nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative or a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same 25 time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and (c) transplanting the stem cells to the recipient.

The effect of the agents that reduce CD38 expression or activity used in context of the present invention is not limited to ex-vivo settings. Hence, based o the findings herein described, novel *in-vivo* applications for these agents are 30 envisaged.

Hence, according to yet another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of mobilization of bone marrow stem cells into the peripheral blood of a donor for harvesting the cells. The method according to this aspect of the present invention is effected by (a) administering an effective
5 amount of an agent to the donor for reducing the expression and/or activity of CD38, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and (b) harvesting the cells by leukapheresis.

In a particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the
10 method is effected by (a) administering an effective amount of an agent to the donor for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and (b) harvesting the cells by leukapheresis.

15 In another particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the method is effected by (a) administering an effective amount of an agent to the donor for reducing a capacity of the stem cells in responding to signaling pathways involving the retinoic acid receptor and/or the retinoid X receptor and/or the Vitamin D receptor, thereby expanding a population of the stem
20 cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and (b) harvesting the cells by leukapheresis.

In still another particular embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the method is effected by (a) administering to the donor an effective amount of an agent selected from the group consisting of nicotinamide, a
25 nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative and a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite, thereby expanding a population of the stem cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the stem cells; and (b) harvesting the cells by leukapheresis.

Preferably, the methods of mobilization of stem cells further comprise
30 administering to the donor at least one cytokine, preferably at least one early

cytokine, which are presently used to induce cell mobilization into peripheral blood.

Further according to an aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of decelerating maturation/differentiation of erythroid precursor cells for the treatment of β -hemoglobinopathic patients. The method according to this aspect of the present invention is effected by administering to the patient an agent for reducing the expression and/or activity of CD38, thereby expanding a population of erythroid precursor cells, while at the same time, substantially inhibiting differentiation of the erythroid precursor cells, such that upon natural removal of the agent from the body, the cells undergo accelerated maturation, resulting in elevated production of fetal hemoglobin.

The agent used according to this method of the present invention can be an agent for abrogating or reducing a capacity of the cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoids and/or Vitamin D, an agent for abrogating or reducing a capacity of the cells in responding to retinoic acid, retinoid X and/or Vitamin D receptor signaling or an agent such as nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative and a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite.

In *in-vivo* settings, administration of the agents the reduce CD38 expression or activity, e.g., retinoic acid, retinoid and/or Vitamin D receptor antagonists, or nicotinamide, a nicotinamide analog, a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog derivative and/or a nicotinamide or a nicotinamide analog metabolite, may be by a pharmaceutical composition including same, which may further include thickeners, carriers, buffers, diluents, surface active agents, preservatives, and the like, all as well known in the art.

The pharmaceutical composition may be administered in various ways, depending on the preference for local or systemic treatment, and on the area to be treated. Administration may be done topically (including ophthalmically, vaginally, rectally, intranasally), orally, by inhalation, or parenterally, for

example by intravenous drip or intraperitoneal, subcutaneous, subdural, intramuscular or intravenous injection, or via an implantable delivery device.

Formulations for topical administration may include, but are not limited to, lotions, ointments, gels, creams, suppositories, drops, liquids, sprays and
5 powders. Conventional pharmaceutical carriers, aqueous, powder or oily bases, thickeners and the like may be necessary or desirable.

Compositions for oral administration include powders or granules, suspensions or solutions in water or non-aqueous media, sachets, capsules or tablets. Thickeners, diluents, flavorings, dispersing aids, emulsifiers or binders
10 may be desirable.

Formulations for parenteral administration may include, but are not limited to, sterile solutions, which may also contain buffers, diluents and other suitable additives.

Formulations for implantable delivery devices may similarly include, but
15 are not limited to, sterile solutions, which may also contain buffers, diluents and other suitable additives.

Dosing is dependent on responsiveness of the condition for treatment, but will normally be one or more doses per day, with course of treatment lasting from several days to several months or until a required effect is achieved.
20 Persons ordinarily skilled in the art can easily determine optimum dosages, dosing methodologies and repetition rates. Slow release administration regimes may be advantageous in some applications.

According to preferred embodiments of the present invention, providing the stem cells with the conditions for ex-vivo cell proliferation comprises
25 providing the cells with nutrients and with cytokines. Preferably, the cytokines are early acting cytokines, such as, but not limited to, stem cell factor, FLT3 ligand, interleukin-1, interleukin-2, interleukin-3, interleukin-6, interleukin-10, interleukin-12, tumor necrosis factor- α and thrombopoietin. It will be appreciated in this respect that novel cytokines are continuously discovered,

some of which may find uses in the methods of cell expansion of the present invention.

Late acting cytokines can also be used. These include, for example, granulocyte colony stimulating factor, granulocyte/macrophage colony
 5 stimulating factor, erythropoietin, FGF, EGF, NGF, VEGF, LIF, Hepatocyte growth factor and macrophage colony stimulating factor.

The stem cells to be expanded by the method of the present invention can be embryonic stem cells or adult stem cells. Embryonic stem cells and methods of their retrieval are well known in the art and are described, for
 10 example, in Trounson AO (*Reprod Fertil Dev* (2001) 13: 523), Roach ML (*Methods Mol Biol* (2002) 185: 1), and Smith AG (*Annu Rev Cell Dev Biol* (2001) 17:435). Adult stem cells are stem cells, which are derived from tissues of adults and are also well known in the art. Methods of isolating or enriching for adult stem cells are described in, for example, Miraglia, S. et al. (1997)
 15 *Blood* 90: 5013, Uchida, N. et al. (2000) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 97: 14720, Simmons, P.J. et al. (1991) *Blood* 78: 55, Prockop DJ (*Cytotherapy* (2001) 3: 393), Bohmer RM (*Fetal Diagn Ther* (2002) 17: 83) and Rowley SD et al (*Bone Marrow Transplant* (1998) 21: 1253), *Stem Cell Biology* Daniel R. Marshak (Editor) Richard L. Gardner (Editor), Publisher: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory
 20 Press, (2001) and *Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation*. Anthony D. Ho (Editor) Richard Champlin (Editor), Publisher: Marcel Dekker (2000).

A presently preferred source for adult stem cells is the hematopoietic system. Hence, according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention the stem cells are hematopoietic stem cells. Such stem cells can be derived
 25 from bone marrow, peripheral blood and neonatal umbilical cord blood. Methods of enriching white blood cells (mononuclear cells) for stem cells are well known in the art, including, selecting for CD34⁺ expressing cells. CD34⁺ cells include pluripotent stem cells and very early progenitor cells, which, under the appropriate conditions may revert to stem cells, as they are not committed
 30 cells.

One most surprising result obtained while reducing the present invention to practice was that stem cells present in the mononuclear cell fraction of blood (i.e., white blood cells), can undergo expansion using the methods of the present invention in a fashion similar to stem cells enriched CD34⁺ cell fraction of blood. Hence, according to an embodiment of the present invention, the stem cells that undergo expansion are mixed (e.g., not separated from, not enriched) with committed cells. This embodiment of the present invention is of particular advantage because it relieves the tedious need for cell separation prior to ex-vivo culturing the cells.

10 In another embodiment, the cells are enriched for hematopoietic CD34⁺ cells and are characterized by an absence, or significantly diminished expression of cell surface antigens CD38 and Lineage specific antigens (Lin, including: CD3, CD61, CD19, CD33, CD14, CD15 and/or CD4).

It was experimentally found that reducing the capacity of the stem cells in responding to the disclosed signaling pathways is reversible, e.g., inherently reversible. In some experiments, following 16-18 weeks in culture the cells ceased to expand and started to differentiate. In other words, cells expanded using the protocols of the present invention to not transform into cell lines. Hence, by exposing such cells following sufficient expansion to growth conditions by which differentiation is induced, one would be able to direct the ex-vivo differentiation of the cells to desired direction, including ex vivo and in vivo cis- and trans-differentiation.

As used herein “cis-differentiation” refers to differentiation of adult stem cells into a tissue from which they were derived. For example, the differentiation of CD34⁺ hematopoietic cells to different committed/mature blood cells constitutes cis-differentiation.

As used herein “trans-differentiation” refers to differentiation of adult stem cells into a tissue from which they were not derived. For example, the differentiation of CD34⁺ hematopoietic cells to cells of different tissue origin, e.g., myocytes constitutes trans-differentiation.

The stem cells used for cell expansion in context of the present invention can be obtained from any tissue of any multicellular organism including both animals and plants. Stem cells were shown to exist in many organs and tissues and are believed to exist in all tissues of animals, including, but not limited to, bone marrow (Rowley SD et al (1998) Bone Marrow Transplant 21: 1253),
 5 peripheral blood (Koizumi K, (2000) Bone Marrow Transplant 26: 787, liver (Petersen BE et al (1998) Hepatology 27: 433) and brain (Pagano SF et al (2000) Stem Cells 18: 295). It is anticipated that all such cells are expandable using the methods of the present invention.

10 Reducing the capacity of the stem cells in responding to the above antagonists and/or signaling pathways of the above receptors is by *ex-vivo* culturing the stem cells in a presence of an effective amount of at least one retinoic acid receptor antagonist, at least one retinoid X receptor antagonist and/or at least one Vitamin D receptor antagonist, preferably, for a time period
 15 of 0.1-50 %, preferably, 0.1-25 %, more preferably, 0.1-15 %, of an entire *ex-vivo* culturing period of the stem cells or for the entire period. In this respect it was surprisingly uncovered that an initial pulse exposure to an antagonist is sufficient to exert cell expansion long after the antagonist was removed from the culturing set up.

20 Many antagonists to RAR, RXR and VDR are presently known, some of which are listed hereinafter.

The retinoic acid receptor antagonist used in context of the different aspects and embodiments of the present invention can be:
 AGN 194310; AGN 109; 3-(4-Methoxy-phenylsulfanyl)-3-methyl-butyric acid;
 25 6-Methoxy-2,2-dimethyl-thiochroman-4-one, 2,2-Dimethyl-4-oxo-thiochroman-6-yltrifluoromethane-sulfonate; Ethyl 4-((2,2 dimethyl-4-oxo-thiochroman-6-yl)ethynyl)-benzoate; Ethyl 4-((2,2-dimethyl-4-trifluoromethanesulfonyloxy-(2H)-thiochromen-6-yl)ethynyl)-benzoate(41); Thiochromen-6-yl]-ethynyl]-benzoate(yl); (p-[(E)-2-[3'4'-Dihydro-4,4'-dimethyl-7'-(heptyloxy)-2'H-1-benzothiopyran-6'yl] propenyl] benzoic acid 1'1'-dioxide; 2E,4E,6E-[7-(3,5-Di-
 30

t-butyl-4-n-butoxyphenyl)-3-methyl]-octa-2,4,6-trienoic acid; 2E,4E,6E-[7-(3,5-Di-t-butyl-4-n-propoxyphenyl)-3-methyl]-octa-2,4,6-trienoic acid; 2E,4E,6E-[7-(3,5-Di-t-butyl-4-n-pentoxyphenyl)-3-methyl]-octa-2,4,6-trienoic acid; 2E,4E,6E-[7-(3,5-Di-t-butyl-4-n-hexoxyphenyl)-3-methyl]-octa-2,4,6-trienoic acid; 2E,4E,6E-[7-(3,5-Di-t-butyl-4-n-heptoxyphenyl)-3-methyl]-octa-2,4,6-trienoic acid; 2E,4E,6E-[7-(3,5-Di-t-butyl-4-n-octoxyphenyl)-3-methyl]-octa-2,4,6-trienoic acid; (2E,4E,6E)-7-[3-t-butyl-5-(1-phenyl-vinyl)-phenyl]-3-methyl-octa-2,4,6-trienoic acid; 2E,4E,6E-[7-(3,5-Di-t-butyl-4-{[4,5-.sup.3 H.sub.2]-n-pentoxy}phenyl)-3-methyl]-octa-2,4,6-trienoic acid; (2E,4E)-

(1RS,2RS)-5-[2-(3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-ethoxy-phenyl)-cyclopropyl]-3-methyl-penta-2,4-dienoic acid ethyl ester; (2E,4E)-(1RS,2RS)-5-[2-(3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-ethoxy-phenyl)-cyclopropyl]-3-methyl-penta-2,4-dienoic acid; (2E,4E)-(1RS,2RS)-5-[2-(3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-butoxy-phenyl)-cyclopropyl]-3-methyl-penta-2,4-dienoic acid; (2E,4E,6Z)-7-[3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-ethoxyphenyl]3-methyl-2,4,6-octatrienoic acid; (2E,4E,6Z)-7-[3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-butyloxyphenyl]-3-methyl-2,4,6-octatrienoic acid; 4-(5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-2-naphthalene-carboxamido) benzoic acid; (2E,4E)-3-methyl-5-[(1S,2S)-2-(5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-naphthalen-2-yl)-cyclopropyl]-penta-2,4-dienoic acid; p-[(E)-2-[3',4'-Dihydro-4',4'-dimethyl-7'-(heptyloxy)-2'H-1-benzothiopyran-6'-yl]propenyl]benzoic acid; 1',1'-dioxide, 4-(7,7,10,10-Tetramethyl-1-pyridin-3-ylmethyl-4,5,7,8,9,10-hexahydro-1H-naphtho[2,3-g]indol-3-yl)-benzoic acid; (2E,4E,6Z)-7-[3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-methoxyphenyl]-3-methyl-2,4,6-octatrienoic acid; (2E,4E,6Z)-7-[3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-ethoxyphenyl]-3-methyl-2,4,6-octatrienoic acid; (2E,4E,6Z)-7-[3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-hexyloxyphenyl]-3-methyl-2,4,6-octatrienoic acid; (2E,4E,6Z)-7-[3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-octyloxyphenyl]-3-methyl-2,4,6-octatrienoic acid; and (2E,4E)-(1RS,2RS)-5-[2-(3,5-di-tert.butyl-2-butoxy-phenyl)-cyclopropyl]-3-methyl-penta-2,4-dienoic acid (2E,4E,6Z)-7-(3-n-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-tetramethylnaphthalene-2-yl)-3-methylocta-2,4,6-trienoic acid, and 4-

(5H-2,3(2,5 dimethyl-2,5-hexano)-5-n-propyldibenzo[b,e][1,4]diazepin-11-

yl)benzoic acid, and 4-(5H-2,3-(2,5-dimethyl-2,5-hexano)-5methyl-8-nitrodibenzo[b,e][1,4]diazepin-11-yl)benzoic acid, and 4-{{4-(4-Ethylphenyl)2,2-dimethyl-(2H)-thiochromen-6-yl}ethynyl}benzoic acid, and 4-[4-2methyl-1,2-dicarba-closo-dodecaboran-1-yl-phenylcarbamoyl]benzoic acid,
 5 and 4-[4,5,7,8,9,10-hexahydro-7,7,10,10-tetramethyl-1-(3-pyridylmethyl)-anthra[1,2-b]pyrrol-3-yl]benzoic acid, and (3-pyridylmethyl)-[5-thiaanthra[2,1-b]pyrrol-3-yl]benzoic acid, and (3-pyridylmethyl)-anthra[2m1-d]pyrazol-3-yl]benzoic acid.

The retinoid X receptor antagonist used in context of the different
 10 aspects and embodiments of the present invention can be:

LGN100572, 1-(3-hydroxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-tetramethylnaphthalene-2-yl)ethanone, 1-(3-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-tetramethylnaphthalene-2-yl)ethanone, 3-(3-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-tetramethylnaphthalene-2-yl)but-2-enenitrile, 3-(3-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-
 15 tetramethylnaphthalene-2-yl)but-2-enal, (2E,4E,6E)-7-3[-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro 5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-2-naphthalene-2-yl]-3-methylocta-2,4,6-trienoic acid, 4-[3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)carbonyl] benzoic acid, 4-[1-(3,5, 5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)ethenyl] benzoic acid, 4-[1(3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-
 20 naphthyl)cyclopropyl] benzoic acid, 4-[1-(3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)ethenyl] benzenete trazole, 2-[1-(5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl) ethenyl]pyridine-5-carboxylic acid, 2-[1-(3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)ethyl]pyridine-5-carboxylic acid, ethyl-2-[1-(3,5,5,8, 8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-
 25 naphthyl)ethenyl]pyridine-5-carboxylate, 5-[1-3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)ethenyl]pyridine-2-carboxylic acid, 2-[1-(3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl) cyclopropyl]pyridine-5-carboxylic acid, methyl 2-[1-(3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-
 30 naphthyl)cyclopropyl]pyridine-5-carboxylate, 4-[1-(3,5, 5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)ethenyl]-N-(4-hydroxyphenyl) benzamide, 2-[1-

(3,5,5,8,8-Pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl) ethenyl] pyridine-5-carboxylic acid, 2-[1-(3,5,5,8,8-Pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)cyclopropyl]pyridine-5-carboxylic acid, 4-[(3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)carbonyl]benzoic acid butyloxime, 4-[(3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl) carbonyl]benzoic acid propyloxime, 4-[(3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)carbonyl]benzoic acid cyanoimine, 4-[(3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)carbonyl]benzoic acid allyloxime, 4-[(3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)carbonyl]benzoic acid 4-(3-methylbut-2-enoic acid)oxime, and 4-[(3,5,5,8,8-pentamethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-2-naphthyl)carbonyl]benzoic acid 1-aminoethyloxime (2E,4E,6Z)-7-(3-n-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-tetramethylnaphthalene-2-yl)-3-methylocta-2,4,6-trienoic acid, and 4-(5H-2,3(2,5 dimethyl-2,5-hexano)-5-n-propyldibenzo[b,e][1,4]diazepin-11-yl)benzoic acid, and 4-(5H-2,3-(2,5-dimethyl-2,5-hexano)-5m.

The Vitamin D receptor antagonist used in context of the different aspects and embodiments of the present invention can be: 1 alpha, 25-(OH)-D₃-26,23 lactone; 1alpha, 25-dihydroxyvitamin D (3); the 25-carboxylic ester ZK159222; (23S)- 25-dehydro-1 alpha-OH-D (3); (23R)-25-dehydro-1 alpha-OH-D (3); 1 beta, 25 (OH)₂ D₃; 1 beta, 25(OH)₂-3-epi-D₃; (23S) 25-dehydro-1 alpha(OH) D₃-26,23-lactone; (23R) 25-dehydro-1 alpha(OH)D₃-26,23-lactone and Butyl-(5Z,7E,22E-(1S,7E,22E-(1S,3R,24R)-1,3,24-trihydroxy-26,27-cyclo-9,10-secocholesta-5,7,10(19),22-tetraene-25-carboxylate) .

The above listed antagonists are known for their high affinity towards their respective cognate receptors. However, it may be possible for these molecules to be active towards other receptors.

According to an additional aspect of the present invention, there is provided an assay of determining whether a specific retinoic acid receptor antagonist, a retinoid X receptor antagonist or a Vitamin D receptor antagonist is an effective cell expansion agent. The assay according to this aspect of the

present invention comprises culturing a population of stem cells, e.g., CD34⁺ hematopoietic cells, or cells of a substantially non-differentiated cell line, such as, but not limited to, USP-1 and USP-3 (Sukoyan MA (2002) Braz J Med Biol Res, 35(5):535, C6, c2, Cr/A-3, DB1 and B6-26 (US Patent No. 6,190,910), and
5 H9.1 and H9.2 (Odorico J. S. (2001) Stem Cells 19: 193) in the presence of the retinoic acid receptor antagonist, the retinoid X receptor antagonist or the Vitamin D receptor antagonist and monitoring expansion of the cells over time, e.g., a few weeks to a few months. If increased expansion and decreased differentiation occurs, as compared to non-treated cells, the retinoic acid
10 receptor antagonist, the retinoid X receptor antagonist or the Vitamin D receptor antagonist tested is an effective cell expansion agent. Preferably, culturing the population of stem cells or cells of a substantially non-differentiated cell line is performed in a presence of an effective amount of a cytokine, preferably, an early acting cytokine or a combination of such
15 cytokines, e.g., thrombopoietin (TPO), interleukin-6 (IL-6), an FLT-3 ligand and stem cell factor (SCF). This assay can be used, by one ordinarily skilled in the art, to determine which of the antagonists listed below is most efficient for the purpose of implementing the various methods, preparations and articles-of-manufacture of the present invention which are further described hereinafter.
20 To determine most effective concentrations and exposure time for achieving optimal results with stem cells of different origins.

Additional objects, advantages, and novel features of the present invention will become apparent to one ordinarily skilled in the art upon
25 examination of the following examples, which are not intended to be limiting. Additionally, each of the various embodiments and aspects of the present invention as delineated hereinabove and as claimed in the claims section below finds experimental support in the following.

EXAMPLES

Reference is now made to the following examples, which together with the above descriptions illustrate the invention in a non-limiting fashion.

5 Generally, the nomenclature used herein and the laboratory procedures utilized in the present invention include molecular, biochemical, microbiological and recombinant DNA techniques. Such techniques are thoroughly explained in the literature. See, for example, "Molecular Cloning: A laboratory Manual" Sambrook et al., (1989); "Current Protocols in
10 Molecular Biology" Volumes I-III Ausubel, R. M., ed. (1994); Ausubel et al., "Current Protocols in Molecular Biology", John Wiley and Sons, Baltimore, Maryland (1989); Perbal, "A Practical Guide to Molecular Cloning", John Wiley & Sons, New York (1988); Watson et al., "Recombinant DNA", Scientific American Books, New York; Birren et al. (eds) "Genome Analysis:
15 A Laboratory Manual Series", Vols. 1-4, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, New York (1998); methodologies as set forth in U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,666,828; 4,683,202; 4,801,531; 5,192,659 and 5,272,057; "Cell Biology: A Laboratory Handbook", Volumes I-III Cellis, J. E., ed. (1994); "Current Protocols in Immunology" Volumes I-III Coligan J. E., ed. (1994); Stites et al. (eds), "Basic
20 and Clinical Immunology" (8th Edition), Appleton & Lange, Norwalk, CT (1994); Mishell and Shiigi (eds), "Selected Methods in Cellular Immunology", W. H. Freeman and Co., New York (1980); available immunoassays are extensively described in the patent and scientific literature, see, for example, U.S. Pat. Nos. 3,791,932; 3,839,153; 3,850,752; 3,850,578; 3,853,987;
25 3,867,517; 3,879,262; 3,901,654; 3,935,074; 3,984,533; 3,996,345; 4,034,074; 4,098,876; 4,879,219; 5,011,771 and 5,281,521; "Oligonucleotide Synthesis" Gait, M. J., ed. (1984); "Nucleic Acid Hybridization" Hames, B. D., and Higgins S. J., eds. (1985); "Transcription and Translation" Hames, B. D., and Higgins S. J., eds. (1984); "Animal Cell Culture" Freshney, R. I., ed. (1986);
30 "Immobilized Cells and Enzymes" IRL Press, (1986); "A Practical Guide to

Molecular Cloning" Perbal, B., (1984) and "Methods in Enzymology" Vol. 1-317, Academic Press; "PCR Protocols: A Guide To Methods And Applications", Academic Press, San Diego, CA (1990); Marshak et al., "Strategies for Protein Purification and Characterization - A Laboratory Course Manual" CSHL Press (1996); all of which are incorporated by reference as if fully set forth herein. Other general references are provided throughout this document. The procedures therein are believed to be well known in the art and are provided for the convenience of the reader. All the information contained therein is incorporated herein by reference.

EXAMPLE 1

RAR-ANTAGONISTS AND THEIR USE IN EX-VIVO HEMATOPOIETIC CELL EXPANSION

Material and Experimental Methods

High-Affinity retinoic acid receptor antagonist (RAR) synthesis:

Synthesis of the RAR antagonist 4-[[4-(4-ethylphenyl)-2,2-dimethyl-(2H)-thiochomen-6-yl]]-benzoic acid, (AGN 194310):

The RAR antagonist AGN194310 was synthesized according to the procedure described by Johnson (26), with some modification.

Synthesis of 3-(4-methoxyphenylthio)-3-methyl-butyric acid:

A heavy-walled screw-cap tube was charged with 3-methyl-2-butenic acid (13.86gm) 3,3-dimethylacrylic acid, (138.4mmol), 4-methoxythiophenol (143.2 mmol), and piperidine (41.6 mmol) [Aldrich]. The mixture was heated to 105-110 °C for 32 hours, then cooled to room temperature. The reaction mixture was dissolved in ethyl acetate (EtOAc) (700 ml) with stirring, and the resulting solution was washed with 1M aqueous HCl (50 ml x 2), water (50 ml), and saturated aqueous NaCl (50 ml). The organic solution was thereafter dried over NaSO₄. Concentration of this organic solution under reduced

pressure afforded an oil and 2 days incubation at – 20 °C yielded a crystalline solid. Forty ml of pentane were added to the solid, which was then crushed and filtered. The solid was washed on filter paper with pentane (20 ml, 2 times) to yield the product 3-(4-methoxyphenylthio)-3-methyl-butyric acid, as
 5 pale yellow crystals (31.4 grams, 94.4 % yield, m.p. 62-64 °C), [¹H-NMR(CDCl₃): d7.5 (t, 2H, J=8Hz), d6.9 (t, 2H, J=6.7Hz), d3.9 (s, 3H, J=16.1Hz), d2.6 (s, 2H), d1.3 (s, 6H)].

Synthesis of 3-(4-methoxyphenylthio)-3-methyl-butyryl chloride:

93.62 mmol oxalyl chloride in 10 ml benzene was added to a solution of
 10 3-(4-methoxyphenylthio)-3-methyl-butyric acid in 100 ml of benzene at room temperature, for 30 minutes. During the addition of the oxalyl chloride, the solution turned yellow. After stirring the reaction mixture for 4 hours at room temperature, the reaction solution was cooled to 5 °C and washed with ice cold 5 % aqueous NaOH (5 ml x 6) (a large volume of gas was released during this
 15 procedure), followed by ice-cold water (15 ml x 2) and finally saturated aqueous NaCl (15 ml). The organic solution was dried over NaSO₄ and concentrated under reduced pressure to give the acyl chloride product as a clear yellow oil. This material was used without further purification in the next step. [¹H-NMR (CDCl₃): d3.8 (s, 3H), d3.1 (s, 2H), d1.4 (s, 6H)].

20 ***Synthesis of 6-methoxy-2,2-dimethyl-thiochroman-4-one:***

A solution of Tin (IV) chloride in 30 ml dichloromethane was added dropwise to a solution of 3-(4-methoxyphenylthio)-3-methyl-butyryl chloride in 180 ml dichloromethane, at 0 °C, yielding a dark red solution. After stirring the reaction mixture at 0 °C for 2 hours, the reaction was quenched by the slow
 25 addition of 115 ml water. The dark red reaction mixture became yellow.

The organic layer was washed with 1M aqueous HCl (50 ml), 5 % aqueous NaOH (50 ml) and a saturated solution of NaCl (50 ml) and was thereafter dried over magnesium sulfate. The resulting organic solution was concentrated under reduced pressure, and distilled under vacuum (135-142 °C,
 30 0.6 mm/Hg) to obtain 6-methoxy-2,2-dimethyl-thiochroman-4-one as a residual

pale-yellow oil (11 grams, 80.7 %); [^1H -NMR (CDCl_3): d7.6 (s, 1H), d7.1 (s, 1H), d7.0 (s, 1H), d3.8 (s, 3H), d2.86 (s, 2H), d1.46 (s, 6H)].

Synthesis of 6-hydroxy-2,2-dimethyl-thiochroman-4-one:

Boron tribromide (20 grams) in 80 ml dichloromethane was added over a
 5 20 minute period to a solution of 6-methoxy-2,2-dimethyl-thiochroman-4-one
 in 50 ml dichloromethane. The reaction mixture was cooled to $-23\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ and
 stirred for 5 hours, cooled to $-78\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$, then quenched by the slow addition of 50
 ml water (0.5 hour). Following warming to room temperature, the colorless
 precipitate was filtered. After separation of the organic layer, the aqueous layer
 10 was extracted with 120 ml dichloromethane. The combined organic layers were
 washed with saturated aqueous NaHCO_3 (50 ml), water (50 ml) and saturated
 aqueous NaCl , then dried over MgSO_4 . Removal of the organic solvent under
 reduced pressure gave a green solid (6 grams of crude product). This product
 was dissolved in 100 ml diethyl ether and the resulting solution was diluted
 15 with 300 ml petroleum ether. Overnight incubation at $-15\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ yielded a
 crystalline product (2.3 grams, 41 % yield, m.p. $122\text{-}126\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$). The filtrate was
 evaporated under vacuum, and the residue (3.42 grams) was dissolved in 30 ml
 diethyl ether. The ether solution was diluted with 150 ml petroleum ether and
 the resulting mixture was kept in a freezer at $-20\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ overnight. Precipitation
 20 and filtration of the solution yielded 1.5 grams of the product 6-methoxy-2,2-
 dimethyl-thiochroman-4-one. This compound was re-precipitated by dissolution
 in 30 ml diethyl ether, then diluted with 20 ml petroleum ether. Incubation at $4\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$
 overnight, yielded 1 gram (80.7 % yield, m.p. $135\text{-}142\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$, 0.6 mm/Hg) of the
 green crystalline product, 6-hydroxy-2,2-dimethyl-thiochroman-4-one. [^1H -
 25 NMR (CDCl_3): d7.8 (s, 1H), d7.7 (s, 1H), d7.1 (s, 1H), d2.8 (s, 2H), d1.45 (s,
 6H)].

Synthesis of 2,2-dimethyl-4-oxo-thiochroman-6-yl-trifluoromethanesulfonate:

Trifluoromethanesulfonic anhydride was added to a stirred solution of 6-
 30 hydroxy-2,2-dimethyl-thiochroman-4-one in anhydrous pyridine. The mixture

was stirred for 4 hours at 0 °C, then stirred overnight at room temperature. Concentration under high vacuum yielded a residue that was treated with diethyl ether (75 ml). The ether solution was separated from the precipitate resulting from the formation of a salt between pyridine and trifluoromethanesulfonic acid. The ether solution was washed with water, then aqueous NaCl, and dried over MgSO₄. After removing the ether, the residue was crystallized. Traces of pyridine were removed under high vacuum. 0.7 gram of the crude product was obtained, and was further purified by column chromatography using 14 grams silica, and a solution of 200 ml petroleum ether:ethyl acetate (95:5) (using 15 ml eluent solution x 13). After evaporation of the product fractions, 0.62 gram of 2,2-dimethyl-4-oxo-thiochroman-6-yl-trifluoro-methanesulfonate was obtained as colorless crystals (76.5 % yield, m.p. 70-74 °C), [¹H-NMR (CDCl₃): δ7.9 (s, 1H), δ7.3 (s, 2H), δ2.8 (s, 2H), δ1.4 (s, 6H)].

Synthesis of 2,2-dimethyl-6-trimethylsilyl-ethynyl-thiochroman-4-one:

A solution of 2,2-dimethyl-4-oxo-thiochroman-6-yl-trifluoro-methanesulfonate in triethylamine and dimethylformamide was sparged with argon for 10 minutes. Trimethylsilylacetylene and bis[triphenylphosphine] palladium(II) chloride were added to this solution. The reaction mixture was heated in a bath at 95-100 °C and maintained a reaction temperature of 88-90 °C, for 5 hours. The reaction solution was cooled to room temperature, diluted with 200 ml water, and extracted with 100 ml ethyl acetate (60 ml x 3). The resulting organic phase was washed with water (50 ml x 2), and brine (50 ml). Finally, the organic solution was dried over MgSO₄, evaporated under reduced pressure, and the resulting residue was further purified by column chromatography using 42 grams silica, and an eluent system composed of 400 ml petroleum ether:ethyl acetate (97:3), yielding 2,2-dimethyl-6-trimethylsilyl-ethynyl-thiochroman-4-one (1.82 grams, 76.4 % yield, m.p. 67-70 °C); [¹H-NMR (CDCl₃): δ7.8 (s, 1H), δ7.3 (s, 2H), δ2.8 (s, 2H), δ1.4 (s,

6H), d0.23 (s, 9H)].

Synthesis of 6-ethynyl-2,2-dimethylthiochroman-4-one:

A solution of 2,2-dimethyl-6-trimethylsilanyl-ethynyl-thiochroman-4-one in methanol and potassium bicarbonate was stirred overnight at room
 5 temperature. The potassium carbonate was dissolved and the reaction was evaporated to a reduced volume of 30-40 ml, diluted with water (to an approximate volume of 70-100 ml), cooled in an ice-water bath and extracted with diethyl ether (60 ml x 3). The combined organic layers were washed with 30 ml water and saturated aqueous NaCl (30 ml) and dried over MgSO₄.
 10 Removal of the solvent under reduced pressure afforded 6-ethynyl-2,2-dimethylthiochroman-4-one as an orange solid (1.3 gram, 97.7 % yield, m.p. 63-66 °C) [¹H-NMR (CDCl₃): d7.8 (s, 1H), d7.3 (s, 2H), d3.0 (s, 1H), d 2.8 (s, 2H), d1.4 (s, 6H)].

Synthesis of ethyl 4-iodobenzoate:

15 A mixture of 4-iodobenzoic acid, 25 ml ethyl alcohol and 20 ml solution of dry HCl in ethyl alcohol was refluxed for 2 hours. The solid was dissolved after 1 hour of boiling. The reaction solution was cooled to room temperature and evaporated under vacuum to a volume of 10 ml. A lower organic layer formed with the chemical conversion of the acid to the ester. The resulting
 20 mixture was cooled in an ice bath. To this mixture 80 ml of diethyl ether, dry sodium hydrogen carbonate (1 gram) and 50 grams of ice were added. This solution was stirred, washed by dissolution of a saturated solution of sodium bicarbonate in 50 ml water and water, dried over sodium sulfate, and evaporated under vacuum, yielding ethyl 4-iodobenzoate as a liquid oil product
 25 (5.43 gram, 96.1 % yield) [¹H-NMR (CDCl₃): d7.8 (s, 1H), d7.79 (s, 1H), 7.6 (s, 1H), d4.4 (d, 2H, J=7.1Hz), d1.4 (s, 3H)].

Synthesis of ethyl 4-[(2,2-dimethyl-4-oxo-thiochroman-6-yl)ethynyl]-benzoate:

A solution of 6-ethynyl-2,2-dimethyl-thiochroman-4-one and ethyl 4-
 30 iodobenzoate in 80 ml triethylamine was purged with argon for 10 minutes. 0.7

gram $\text{Pd}[\text{PPh}_3]_2\text{Cl}_2$ and 0.19 gram CuI were added to this solution. The solution was sparged with argon for an additional 5 minutes, then stirred for 2 days at room temperature. The reaction mixture was filtered through a pad of celite with a diethyl ether wash. The filtrate was evaporated under reduced pressure.

- 5 The solid residue was purified by column chromatography (40 grams silica, petroleum ether:ethyl acetate 95:5, 750 ml eluent solvent system) to yield ethyl 4-[(2,2-dimethyl-4-oxo-thiochroman-6-yl) ethynyl]-benzoate (1.26 gram, 56.5 % yield, m.p. 102-104 °C). [^1H -NMR(CDCl_3): d8.275 (s, 2H), d7.6 (s, 3H), d7.5 (s, 1H), d7.2 (s, 1H), d4.3 (t, 2H, $J=7$), d2.8 (s, 2H), d1.48 (s, 3H)].

10 ***Synthesis of Ethyl 4-[(2,2-dimethyl-4-trifluoromethanesulfonyloxy)-(2H)-thiochromen-6-yl]ethynyl]benzoate:***

- A solution of sodium bis(trimethylsilyl)amide (0.6 M solution in toluene) and 10 ml of tetrahydrofuran was cooled to - 78 °C and a solution of ethyl 4-[(2,2-Dimethyl-4-oxo-thiochroman-6-yl)ethynyl]benzoate in 10 ml
15 tetrahydrofuran (THF) was slowly added. After 30 minutes, a solution of 2-[N,N-bis(trifluoromethanesulfonyl)amino]pyridine in 7 ml THF was added to the reaction mixture. After 5 minutes, the cooling bath was removed and the reaction solution was warmed to room temperature, stirred overnight and quenched by the addition of a saturated aqueous solution of NH_4Cl (20 ml).
20 Two solvent layers were formed. The solution mixture was extracted with ethyl acetate (75 ml). The combined organic layers were washed with 5 % aqueous NaOH (10 ml), water (15 ml x 2), dried over MgSO_4 , then concentrated under reduced pressure. The crude product (1.74 gram) was purified by column chromatography with 35 grams silica, and 2 % ethyl acetate/petroleum ether
25 (500ml, 20 x 25 ml) eluent system. After evaporation of the combined eluted product fractions, ethyl 4-[(2,2-dimethyl-4-trifluoromethanesulfonyloxy)-(2H)-thiochromen-6-yl) ethynyl] benzoate (1.16 gram, 71 % yield, m.p. 100-104 °C) was obtained, as a pale yellow solid. [^1H -NMR (CDCl_3): d8.2 (s, 2H), d7.6 (s, 3H), d7.5 (s, 1H), d7.2 (s, 1H), d6.0 (s, 1H), d4.4 (t, 6H, $J=24\text{Hz}$)].

30 ***Synthesis of ethyl 4-[[4-(4-ethylphenyl)-2,2-dimethyl- [2H]-***

thiochromen-6-yl]-ethynyl]-benzoate:

7.25 ml of 1.7 M $\text{LiC}(\text{CH}_3)_3$ in pentane were added to a solution of p-bromo-ethyl-benzene (cooled to $-78\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$) in 4 ml of THF. A solution of 658.7 mg zinc chloride in 8 ml THF was added, and the reaction mixture was warmed to room temperature, stirred for 40 minutes, then transferred to a second flask containing ethyl 4-[(2,2-Dimethyl-4-trifluoromethylsulfonyl)-(2H)-thiochromen-6-yl)ethynyl]benzoate and $\text{Pd}(\text{PPh}_3)_4$ in 8 ml THF. The resulting solution was heated to $50\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ for 2 hours, stirred at room temperature overnight, then quenched by addition of saturated aqueous NH_4Cl (10ml) for 10 minutes. Two layers formed. The mixture was extracted with 75 ml ethyl acetate and the combined organic layers were washed with water (10 ml), and saturated NaCl. After drying the organic solution over MgSO_4 , the solution was concentrated under reduced pressure, and purified by column chromatography using 24 grams silica, and a petroleum ether:ethyl acetate (95:5) eluent system (200 ml) yielding ethyl 4-[[4-(4-ethylphenyl)-2,2-dimethyl-[2H]-thiochromen-6-yl]-ethynyl]-benzoate

$^1\text{H-NMR}$ (CDCl_3): δ 8.2 (s, 2H), δ 7.6 (s, 2H), δ 7.4 (s, 2H), δ 7.2 (s, 1H), δ 7.1 (s, 2H), δ 7.0 (s, 2H), δ 6.0 (s, 1H), δ 4.4 (t, 2H, $J=24\text{Hz}$), δ 2.8 (t, 2H, $J=15\text{Hz}$), δ 1.6 (s, 6H), δ 1.4 (t, 3H, $J=14\text{Hz}$).

Synthesis of 4-[[4-(4-Ethylphenyl)-2,2-dimethyl-(2H)-thiochroman-6-yl]-ethynyl]benzoic acid:

Two ml of a 2 M solution of NaOH were added to a solution of ethyl 4[[4-(4-ethylphenyl)-2,2-dimethyl-[2H]-thiochromen-6-yl]-ethynyl]benzoate in THF and ethanol. The solution was heated to $40\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$, stirred overnight, then cooled to room temperature. The reaction mixture was acidified with 1 N HCl (4 ml). At the beginning of the process, the reaction mixture formed a heterogeneous system. The mixture was extracted with ethyl acetate (25 ml x 2). The combined organic layers were washed with 10 ml water, saturated aqueous NaCl, and dried with NaSO_4 , and the solvent was removed under reduced pressure. The residual solid (0.31 gram) was recrystallized from

acetonitrile (25 ml) to yield 4-[[4-(4-ethylphenyl)-2,2-dimethyl- (2H)-thiochroman-6-yl]-ethynyl]benzoic acid, (AGN194310) (0.236 gram, 70 %) as a colorless solid (m.p. 210-212 °C) [¹H-NMR (DMSO-d₆): δ8.2 (s, 2H), δ7.8 (s, 2H), δ7.6 (s, 2H), δ7.4 (s, 2H), δ7.2 (s, 2H), δ7.0 (s, 1H), δ6.0 (s, 1H), δ2.6 (t, 2H, J=35Hz), δ1.6 (s, 6H), δ1.4 (t, 3H, J=46Hz)].

Mononuclear cell fraction collection and purification:

Human blood cells were obtained from umbilical cord blood from female patients following full-term, normal delivery (informed consent was obtained). Samples were collected and processed within 12 hours postpartum. Blood was mixed with 3 % Gelatin (Sigma, St. Louis, MO), sedimented for 30 minutes to remove most red blood cells. The leukocyte-rich fraction was harvested and layered on a Ficoll-Hypaque gradient (1.077 gram/ml; Sigma), and centrifuged at 400 g for 30 minutes. The mononuclear cell fraction in the interface layer was collected, washed three times and resuspended in phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) solution (Biological Industries) containing 0.5 % bovine serum albumin (BSA, Fraction V; Sigma).

Purification of CD34⁺ cells from mononuclear cell fractions:

To purify CD34⁺ mononuclear cells, the fraction was subjected to two cycles of immuno-magnetic separation using the MiniMACS[®] or Clinimax[®] CD34 Progenitor Cell Isolation Kit (Miltenyi Biotec, Auburn, CA) as per manufacturer's recommendations. The purity of the CD34⁺ population obtained ranged from 95 % to 98 % as was determined by flow cytometry (see below).

To further purify the CD34⁺ population into CD34⁺38⁻ or the CD34⁺ Lin⁻ sub-fractions, the purified CD34⁺ cells were further labeled for CD38 (Dako A/S, Glostrup, Denmark) or lineage antigens (BD Biosciences, Erermbodegem, Belgium). The negatively labeled fraction was measured and sorted by a FACS sorter.

For CD34⁻Lin⁻ purification, the CD34⁻ fraction was depleted from cells expressing lineage antigens using a negative selection column (StemCell Technologies, Vancouver, BC, Canada).

Ex-vivo expansion of CD34⁺ cell populations:

CD34⁺ expressing purified cells above were cultured in 24-well Costar Cell Culture Clusters (Corning Inc., Corning, NY) or culture bags (American Fluoroseal Corp), at a concentration of 10⁴ cells/ml in alpha medium (Biological Industries, Beit Haemek, Israel) supplemented with 10 % fetal bovine serum (FBS, Biological Industries). The following human recombinant cytokines were added: Thrombopoietin (TPO), interleukin-6 (IL-6), FLT-3 ligand and stem cell factor (SCF), all at final concentrations of 50 ng/ml each, though occasionally IL-3, at a concentration of 20 ng/ml, was added either together or instead of SCF. For non-hematopoietic cell differentiation, FGF, EGF, NGF, VEGF, LIF or Hepatocyte growth factor (HGF) were used to supplement the growth medium, either alone or in various combinations. All cytokines used were purchased from Perpo Tech, Inc. (Rocky Hill, NJ). The cultures were incubated at 37 °C, 5 % CO₂, in a humidified atmosphere.

Alternatively, whole mononuclear fraction cells (MNC) were isolated, cultured and supplemented with cytokines, as above.

At weekly intervals, cell cultures were topped and semi-depopulated and were supplemented with fresh medium, serum and cytokines or supplemented with fresh growth medium, alone. At predetermined time points, cells were harvested, stained with trypan blue, counted, and cell morphology was determined via the use of cytospin (Shandon, UK)-prepared smears stained with May-Grunwald/Giemsa solutions.

RAR antagonist supplementation of ex-vivo hematopoietic stem/progenitor cell cultures:

CD34⁺ purified and whole MNC cultures were prepared and maintained as described above. AGN 194310 RAR antagonist was added to test cultures at concentrations ranging from 1 x 10⁻³ – 1 x 10⁻¹¹ M [or 410 µg/l to 4.1 x 10⁻⁵ µg/l] . The antagonist was added for a predetermined, limited period, for up to three weeks or continuously during the entire culture period.

Morphological assessment:

Morphological characterization of the resulting culture populations was accomplished on aliquots of cells deposited on glass slides via cytopspin (Cytocentrifuge, Shandon, Runcorn, UK). Cells were fixed, stained with May-Grunwald/Giemsa stain and examined microscopically.

5 ***Surface antigen analysis:***

Cells were harvested, washed with a PBS solution containing 1 % bovine sera albumin (BSA) and 0.1 % sodium azide (Sigma), and stained at 4 °C for 60 minutes with fluorescein isothiocyanate or phycoerythrin-conjugated antibodies (all from Immunoquality Products, the Netherlands). The cells were then
10 washed with the same buffer and analyzed by FACS caliber or Facstarplus flow cytometers. Cells were passed at a rate of 1000 cells/second, using saline as the sheath fluid. A 488 nm argon laser beam served as the light source for excitation. Emission of ten thousand cells was measured using logarithmic amplification, and analyzed using CellQuest software. Negative control
15 staining of cells was accomplished with mouse IgG-PE (Dako A/S Glostrup, Denmark) and mouse IgG-FITC (BD Biosciences, Erembodegem, Belgium).

Determination of CD34 and other hematopoietic marker expression:

CD34 surface expression on short and long-term cultures initiated either with purified CD34⁺ cells or the entire MNC fraction was determined as
20 follows: CD34⁺ cells were positively reselected (Miltenyi kit) and counted. Purity was confirmed by subsequent FACS and cell morphology analysis.

Reselected CD34⁺ cell subsets were stained for the following combination of antigens: CD34PE/CD38FITC and CD34PE/38, 33, 14, 15, 3, 4, 61, 19 (Lin) FITC. The fraction positive for CD34 and negative for CD38
25 was defined as CD34⁺CD38⁻. The fraction positive for CD34 and negative for LIN was defined as CD34⁺Lin⁻ cell fraction.

Cell population calculations:

FACS analysis results are given as percentage values of cells. Absolute numbers of subsets are calculated from the absolute number of CD34⁺ cells.

30 Determination of baseline levels of CD34⁺/CD38⁻ and CD34⁺/Lin⁻ cells

was conducted as follows: CD34⁺ cells were purified from 3 thawed cord blood units and stained for the above markers. The mean of these experiments was considered as the baseline value.

Total cell counts, numbers of CD34⁺ cells and subsets, and CFU numbers are presented as cumulative numbers, with the assumption that the cultures had not been passaged; i.e., the number of cells per ml were multiplied by the number of passages performed.

Assaying Colony Forming Unit (CFU) ability:

Cells were cloned in semi-solid, methylcellulose-containing medium supplemented with 2 IU/ml erythropoietin (Eprex, Cilag AG Int., Switzerland), stem cell factor and IL-3, both at 20 ng/ml, and G-CSF and GM-CSF, both at 10 ng/ml (all from Perpo Tech). Cultures were incubated for 14 days at 37 °C, 5 % CO₂ in a humidified atmosphere.

Determination of LTC-CFUc values:

Briefly, the ability of the cultures to maintain self-renewal was measured by determination of the content of colony forming unit cells in the long and extended long-term cultures (LTC-CFUc), as described in the references hereinabove.

Experimental Results

RAR antagonist treatment of enriched CD34⁺ populations alters surface differentiation marker expression resulting in large numbers of cells with a less-differentiated phenotype in short-term cultures:

In order to determine retinoid receptor antagonist effects on the *ex-vivo* expansion of stem cells, CD34⁺ cell enriched cultures were initiated in the presence of a combination of 4 cytokines with and without different concentrations of the retinoic acid receptor antagonist AGN 194310. Two weeks after the initial seeding, the percentage of cells bearing the CD34⁺ marker (considered to be mostly committed progenitor cells), as well as the percentage of cells bearing the markers CD34⁺/CD38⁻ and CD34⁺Lin⁻

(considered to represent the stem and early progenitor compartment) was ascertained by FACS analysis.

The FACS analysis plots are shown in Figures 1A-C. Retinoic acid receptor (RAR) antagonist treated cultures contained similar numbers of total
5 and CD34⁺ cells as compared to cytokine-only treated cultures. RAR antagonist treatment completely abolished the expression of the CD38 antigen and concurrently, significantly inhibited the expression of the additional differentiation associated antigens CD33, CD14, CD15, CD4, CD3, CD19 and CD61, which was a totally unexpected phenomenon. Table 1 below
10 summarizes the data from the FACS analysis.

Table 1

	No. of cells ($\times 10^4$)	% 34^+ cells	% $34^+/38^-$ cells	% $34^+/\text{Lin}^-$ cells
control (cytokines only)	52	19.41	6.82	3.96
RAR antagonist, 10^{-5} M	42	18.94	17.14	15.18
RAR antagonist, 10^{-6} M	52	19.59	17.16	11.91

In an additional set of experiments, the stem and early progenitor cell subsets were measured following 2 weeks expansion from a re-selected $\text{CD}34^+$ cell fraction. After two weeks in culture, $\text{CD}34^+$ cells were re-selected and analyzed by FACS, as above, for the presence of the surface markers $\text{CD}34^+\text{CD}38^-$ and $\text{CD}34^+\text{Lin}^-$ (Figure 2). RAR antagonist-treated cultures of reselected $\text{CD}34^+$ cells revealed a 1000-fold increase in $\text{CD}34^+\text{CD}38^-$ and a 500-fold increase in $\text{CD}34^+\text{Lin}^-$ surface expression. In marked contrast, reselected control cultures treated with cytokines alone revealed only a 36-fold expansion of the $\text{CD}34^+\text{CD}38^-$ and an 8-fold expansion of the $\text{CD}34^+\text{Lin}^-$ compartments. Despite the marked differences in surface antigen expression, the total number of cells, and total number of $\text{CD}34^+$ cells was comparable in all cultures. These results indicate that RAR antagonists preferably enable marked proliferation, yet limited differentiation of the stem cell compartment. RAR antagonists thus directly impact the high fold expansion of these rare cells during the short-term culture period. It could also be concluded that the antagonists do not have any positive or negative effect on more mature, committed $\text{CD}34^+$ cells.

RAR antagonist treatment of enriched $\text{CD}34^+$ populations alters surface differentiation marker expression resulting in large numbers of cells with a less-differentiated phenotype in long-term cultures:

In order to find out whether the RAR antagonists potentiate a stem cell fraction with higher self-renewal ability, the effect of a limited, short-term (2-3 weeks) RAR antagonist culture treatment was tested on long-term expansion of

CD34⁺ cells and subsets. Cultures were treated with RAR antagonists for the first three weeks only and then incubated for an additional eight weeks in the absence of the antagonist. In order to determine the effect of the antagonist on short and long term expansion of CD34⁺ cells, representative samples were taken from the cultures at the time intervals indicated (Figure 3), for re-selection of CD34⁺ cells. CD34⁺ surface expression was again determined by FACS analysis following a positive selection step (Figure 5B). During the first three weeks of incubation there were no significant differences between control and RAR antagonist treated cultures in terms of the numbers of CD34⁺-bearing cells. Following an additional eight weeks of incubation (week 11 of the culture), the RAR antagonist pre-treated cultures revealed a continuous, long-term increased expression of surface CD34⁺ antigen (Figure 3A) whereas no CD34⁺ cells could be detected in the control cultures. . A 92-fold increase in expression was seen in RAR antagonist treated cultures between week three to eleven and a 1621-fold expansion of this compartment occurred since the initiation of the cultures.

Expression of the CD34⁺CD38⁻ and CD34⁺Lin⁻ surface markers was verified in a highly purified, CD34⁺ re-selected fraction (Figure 3B-C). After two weeks in culture, while control samples revealed a modest 10-fold increase in CD34⁺Lin⁻ surface expression, RAR antagonist treated cultures expanded by a marked 530-fold. CD34⁺Lin⁻ expression at week eleven, 9 weeks after the termination of the treatment with the antagonist, revealed a 16,700-fold increase in CD34⁺Lin⁻ expression. Comparison between the fold-expansion of RAR antagonist treated cultures versus that of control cells indicates that only the former enables a significant continuous proliferation of stem cells in extended long-term cultures. The continued expansion of stem cells in the absence of RAR antagonists indicates that even a relatively short pulse with the antagonist is sufficient to modify stem cell responses.

In an additional experiment, cultures were treated for one week only with cytokines only (control) or with cytokines and the RAR antagonist. A marked

long-term effect of the RAR antagonist was noticed at week 13 of incubation, as is demonstrated in the results presented in Table 2 below. At week 20, the RAR antagonist pre-treated cultures deteriorated and the cells underwent normal differentiation, though in a slower kinetic that the control. These results indicate that a one-week RAR antagonist treatment is sufficient for dramatically modulating the proliferation ability of stem cells in *ex-vivo* conditions as the RAR antagonist transiently potentiate stem cell proliferation yet maintains their self-renewal ability.

Table 2

Treatment	No. of CD34+ cells	No. of CFU*103
Control (week 13)	0	0
Control (week 20)	0	0
RAR antagonist (10^{-5} M) (week 13)	10322	66355
RAR antagonist (10^{-5} M) (week 20)	0	0

10

The limited extensive and durable cell proliferation enabled by the RAR antagonist is further demonstrated in another experiment, where it was shown that *ex-vivo* cultures supplemented with the RAR antagonist AGN194310 (10^{-7} M or 0.41 microgram/liter) enabled cell proliferation, only until 11 weeks post initial seeding of culture cells (Figure 4). CFU forming ability was assayed as well, yet peak colony forming unit ability preceded peak absolute number of CD34⁺ cells by approximately one week, whereupon a precipitous decline in proliferation was evident, at which point cellular differentiation occurred, as evidenced by the loss of clonogenic (CFU forming ability) potential of the culture. These results, which describe a normal behavior of stem cells, namely extensive proliferation followed by differentiation are in marked contrast to previous reports that integration of a dominant negative retinoid receptor gene

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sustain infinite proliferation, in other words, resulted in the creation of cell lines (Muramatsu M, Biochem Biophys Res Commun 2001 Jul 27;285(4):891-6 “reversible integration of the dominant negative retinoid receptor gene for ex vivo expansion of hematopoietic stem/progenitor cells), whereas in the present invention, cells were fully capable of normal differentiation, following extended ex-vivo proliferation.

A representative FACS chart plot of CD34⁺ cells 2 and 11 weeks following re-selection is shown in Figure 5. While control cultures expressed markers for a more differentiated state, RAR antagonist treated samples expressed a less differentiated phenotype, as evidenced by the leftward shift in expression profile. These findings indicated that although not lineage negative, most of the CD34⁺ cells derived from RAR antagonist treated cultures expressed fewer lineage related surface markers.

RAR antagonist treatment of mononuclear cell populations expands a population of cells with a less-differentiated phenotype

Mononuclear cell fractions cultured in the presence of RAR antagonists and cytokines similarly revealed a significant increase in the number of CD34⁺Lin⁻ cells (78 %, 24 %) as quantitated by FACS analysis from a reselected, highly purified CD34⁺ cell fraction, as compared to controls, 2 and 5 weeks (respectively), after initial seeding (Table 3). However, most remarkable is that these cells responded to the RAR antagonists and expanded an undifferentiated population, even in mixed culture conditions, without prior purification of the CD34⁺ population. RAR antagonist treatment was sufficient to stimulate specific expansion of the stem/progenitor cell compartment, as 5 weeks post seeding, while control MNCs had no detectable CD34⁺ population, RAR antagonist treated cultures revealed significant numbers of CD34⁺ cells, and those that were lineage marker deficient. Thus, any factors elaborated by the MNC culture cells that suppress CD34⁺ cell survival in control samples are insufficient to override the signal provided by the RAR antagonist to elaborate this compartment.

Table 3***Expansion of CD34⁺/Lin⁻ mononuclear cells***

2 weeks		
	Cytokines only	Cytokines +RAR antagonist 10 ⁻⁶ M
No of CD34 cells X 10 ⁴ *	176	169
No of CD34 ⁺ /Lin ⁻ X 10 ⁴ *	1.76	132.5
% CD34/Lin ⁻	1	78.4

5 weeks		
	Cytokines only	Cytokines +RAR antagonist 10 ⁻⁶ M
No of CD34 cells X 10 ⁴ *	0	985
No of CD34 ⁺ /Lin ⁻ X 10 ⁴ *	0	237.8
% CD34/Lin ⁻	0	24.1

* Cumulative value

5

RAR antagonist treatment enhances long-term culture colony forming unit (LTC-CFUc) ability

Demonstration of a culture's ability to form colony forming units (CFUs) is another functional, *in vitro* method for verifying the presence of stem and early progenitor cells with a high self-renewal potential. Here it is demonstrate that culture pre-treatment with RAR antagonists enabled greater expansion of cells with a self-renewal capacity as evidenced by the presence of increasing numbers of CFU cells during the extended long-term culture period.

Long-term CD34⁺ cell cultures were supplemented with a combination of 4 cytokines, Flt3, TPO, IL-6 and IL-3, with and without varying predetermined concentrations of the RAR antagonist AGN 194310. RAR antagonist treatment of the cultures was for a limited period of three weeks or was continuous during the entire culture period. The ability to form CFUs was

determined for long-term (6 weeks) cultures treated with 2 doses of the RAR antagonist for a short pulse or continuously and was compared to control samples treated with cytokines alone. Long-term cultures pulsed for the first 3 weeks with the antagonist revealed a 5-fold increase in CFU content as compared to control cultures (Figures 6A and 6B. Enumeration of mix-colonies indicated that control cultures did not contain any mix-colony forming unit cells, whereas antagonist treated cultures contained a higher number of cells with CFU-mix potential (Figure 7).

RAR antagonist treatment enhances extended long-term culture colony forming unit (LTC-CFUc) ability:

The ability to form CFUc was determined for extended long-term (8-10 week) cultures treated with the RAR antagonists, as well. The differences in CFU content were significantly more pronounced during this culture period. RAR antagonist treatment markedly increased CFUc content between week 6 to 10, as compared to control cultures, which lost the ability to regenerate cells with CFU potential (Figures 6A and 6B) RAR antagonist pulse-treatment or continuous treatment increased CFU content by 15×10^4 . Pulse treatment with the antagonist yielded the highest level of CFU-mix content, as well (Figure 7)

EXAMPLE 2

RAR-ANTAGONISTS AND THEIR USE IN EX-VIVO HEPATOCYTE EXPANSION

Material and Experimental Methods

Isolation and Culture of Primary Hepatocytes:

Three intact livers were harvested from 3 week old VLVC female mice (Harlan Laboratories, Jerusalem, Israel), dissected and washed twice with DMEM (Beit Haemek, Israel), incubated with DMEM in the presence 0.05% collagenase for 30 minutes at 37 °C, ground and passed through a 200 µm mesh sieve, yielding individual hepatocytes. Cells were washed twice and viability

was ascertained with trypan blue. Cells were plated in collagen-coated, 35 mm tissue culture plates at a density of 4×10^4 live cells/ml in F12 media (containing 15 mM Hepes, 0.1% glucose, 10 mM sodium bicarbonate, 100units/ml penicillin-streptomycin, glutamine, 0.5 units/ml insulin, 7.5m
 5 cg/ml hydrocortisone, and 10% fetal bovine serum). Medium was changed after 12 hours, the cells were washed twice with phosphate buffered saline (PBS) and new medium was added. Medium was changed twice a week.

Hepatocytes were also grown in the presence of Epidermal Growth Factor (EGF),Platelet-Derived Growth Factor β chain (PDGF-BB),Fibroblast
 10 growth Factors (FGF-4) and Hepatocyte Growth Factor (HGF), at 20-50 ng/ml each, for the entire culturing period according to the method of Schwartz et al. (Schwartz RE, Reyes M, Koodie L, Jiang Y, Blackstad M, Lund T, Lenvik T, Johnson S, Hu WS, Verfaillie CM. Multipotent adult progenitor cells from bone marrow differentiate into functional hepatocyte-like cells. J Clin Invest. 2002;
 15 109 (10): 1291-302). Hepatocytes were also grown in serum free medium according to the method of Runge et al. (Runge D, Runge DM, Jager D, Lubecki KA, Beer Stolz D, Karathanasis S, Kietzmann T, Strom SC, Jungermann K, Fleig WE, Michalopoulos GK.Serum-free, long-term cultures of human hepatocytes: maintenance of cell morphology, transcription factors, and
 20 liver-specific functions. Biochem Biophys Res Commun. 2000; 269(1): 46-53).

In all of the above-mentioned hepatocytes culture conditions, cells are grown in the presence or absence of the retinoic acid antagonist AGN 194310 at concentrations ranging from 10^{-5} M to 10^{-9} M.

After a period of 3 weeks, cultures treated with 10^{-5} M antagonist were
 25 detached with 0.25% trypsin, split and replated at a 1:2 ratio. The cells were either immunostained as described below, or visualized with Giemsa staining.

Murine hepatocyte cultures supplemented with EGF and HGF were evaluated as primary cultures, or following first and second passages. First passage cultures were grown for 2 weeks, split 1:2 and immunostained 8 days
 30 later for the presence of albumin, as described below. Second passage cultures

were similarly grown for 2 weeks, split 1:2, and grown for an additional week, then split 1:4 and similarly immunostained 4 days later.

Histologic Characterization:

Hepatocytes and ex-vivo expanded cells were fixed in methanol directly
 5 in their cell culture plates and each procedure performed by standard procedures as outlined below.

The cellular uptake of organic anions by culture hepatocytes commonly use as markers of hepatocyte functionality, was studied by indocyanine green (ICG) dye uptake. ICG (Sigma, Jerusalem, Israel)) was dissolved in DMEM
 10 yielding a final concentration of 1 mg/ml (Yamada T, Yoshikawa M, Kanda S, Kato Y, Nakajima Y, Ishizaka S, Tsunoda Y. In vitro differentiation of embryonic stem cells into hepatocyte-like cells identified by cellular uptake of indocyanine green. Stem Cells. 2002; 20(2): 146-54). Ten days cultured hepatocytes were washed twice with PBS and incubated with 400 μ l of the dye
 15 for 15 minutes at 37 $^{\circ}$ C. Samples were then rinsed 3 times with PBS, and visualized by light microscopy..

Ex-vivo expanded cells and hepatocytes were stained with Giemsa stain, according to manufacturer's instructions (Shandon, Pittsburg, PA) for 4 minutes at room temperature, washed in buffer solution for 4 minutes and washed 3-4
 20 times with rinse solution.

Immunocytochemistry

Hepatocytes were probed for expression of α -fetoprotein (AFP) using a rabbit polyclonal antibody raised against a recombinant protein of human origin that cross-reacts with AFP from mouse (H-140 Santa Cruz Technology, Santa
 25 Cruz, CA), and albumin using a rabbit antiserum to mouse albumin (Cappel-ICN, Aurora, Ohio). Cells were fixed in methanol at -20 $^{\circ}$ C for 10 minutes, rinsed with PBS for 5 minutes, and permeabilized with 0.1% triton-X (Sigma, Jerusalem, Israel) in PBS for 5 minutes. The cells were then washed with Tris buffer saline (TBS) for 5 minutes and incubated with 1% bovine serum albumin
 30 (BSA) in PBS for 10 minutes. Endogeneous peroxidases were inactivated by

incubation with peroxidase block (Envision, Dako, Carpinteria, CA) for 5 minutes, at room temperature. Cells were incubated with antibodies raised in rabbit against mouse albumin (at a dilution of 1:100); or against α -fetoprotein (at a dilution of 1:25) for 30 minutes. Samples were then visualized for peroxidase activity (via methods according to manufacturer's instructions using the Envision HRP-system (Dako, Carpinteria, CA), and counterstained with hematoxylin (Dako, Carpinteria, CA).

Experimental Results

Primary cultures derived from 3 weeks old mouse livers, grown in media in the absence of cytokines, were probed for the expression of hepatocyte-specific markers including early development markers like α -fetoprotein (which is specific for less differentiated progenitor cells) and albumin which is a marker for mature hepatocytes, following 3 weeks in culture. Cultured cells stained positively (red-brown precipitate) for α -fetoprotein (Figure 8A), and for albumin (data not shown) indicating the presence of functional hepatocytes. Incubation of the cultures in the presence of the 10^{-5} M retinoic acid antagonist resulted in an increase in the fraction of cells that stained positively for α -fetoprotein as compared to control cultures (Figure 8B). This increase may signal the proliferation of early hepatocytes. Similarly, giemsa staining of the cultures revealed a large population of oval cells (hepatocyte stem progenitor cells are defined as oval cells) in cultures treated with the retinoic acid antagonist (Figure 9B) while few were apparent in untreated control cultures (Figure 9A).

Hepatocytes cultures grown in the presence of the antagonist and in the absence of cytokines for 3 weeks were trypsinized, split, and replated. The cells reattached to the culture plate and revealed typical hepatocytic morphology (Figure 9C), as opposed to previous data indicating a difficulty in growing primary hepatocytes for extended periods of time in culture, especially in the absence of cytokines (Wick M, Koebe HG, Schildberg FW. New ways in

hepatocyte cultures: Cell immobilization technique ALTEX. 1997; 14(2):51-56; Hino H, Tateno C, Sato H, Yamasaki C, Katayama S, Kohashi T, Aratani A, Asahara T, Dohi K, Yoshizato K. A long-term culture of human hepatocytes which show a high growth potential and express their differentiated phenotypes. 5 Biochem Biophys Res Commun. 1999 Mar 5;256(1):184-91; Tateno C, Yoshizato K. Long-term cultivation of adult rat hepatocytes that undergo multiple cell divisions and express normal parenchymal phenotypes. Am J Pathol. 1996; 148(2): 383-92).

The supplementation of the culture media with growth factors in primary 10 hepatocyte cultures treated with RAR antagonist revealed similar results to unsupplemented cultures, in that supplemented cultures stained positively for the production of α -fetoprotein (Figure 10C), as compared to control cultures, supplemented with growth factors, but deprived of the RAR antagonist, where no immunostaining was evident (Figure 10D). Background staining, as 15 determined by probing for albumin expression, was negligible in RAR antagonist treated (Figure 10A) and untreated, supplemented cultures (Figure 10B). Thus culture supplementation with growth factors alone is insufficient to expand a less-differentiated cellular phenotype.

Similarly, first and second passages of growth factor-supplemented 20 hepatocyte cultures were evaluated for their ability to persist in culture. In first passage growth factor-supplemented cultures both RAR antagonist treated (Figure 11B) and untreated control cultures (Figure 11A) revealed the presence of typical hepatocytes, however only RAR treated cultures (Figure 11 C and D) revealed a large number of islets of oval cells, indicative of a hepatocyte stem 25 cell population.

Second passage growth factor-supplemented cultures showed a marked diminishment in the number of hepatocytes evident in control cultures (Figure 11E), as compared to RAR treated cultures (Figure 11F), indicative of a failure of growth factor supplementation alone to provide expanded and persistent 30 hepatocytes in culture. Only RAR antagonist treatment enabled expansion and

long-term culture of hepatocyte populations.

EXAMPLE 3

RXR AND RAR+RXR ANTAGONISTS AND THEIR USE IN EX-VIVO CELL EXPANSION

Material and Experimental Methods

Synthesis of the RXR antagonist (2E, 4E, 6Z)-7-[3-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-2-naphthalene-2-yl]-3-methylocta-2,4,6-trienoic acid] (LGN 100754):

The synthesis of LGN100754 was based on (i) Canan-Koch et al. J. Med. Chem. 39, 17, 3229-3234 [reaction scheme, page 3231; and (ii) Synthetic protocols from International Application No. PCT/US96/14876 (WO 97/12853) entitled Dimer-Selective RXR Modulators and Methods for Their Use. All materials were purchased from Ligand Pharmaceuticals Inc.

Synthesis of 6-ethynyl-1,1,4,4-tetramethyl-7-propoxy-1,2,3,4-tetrahydronaphthalene:

Phosphorus oxychloride (0.234 grams, 0.142 ml, 1.52 mmol) was added dropwise to dimethyl formamide (DMF) (4 ml) at room temperature under a nitrogen atmosphere. The solution was stirred for 30 minutes. The 1-(3-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-tetramethylnaphthalen-2-yl) ethanone was added quickly (in one portion) to the orange solution, the reaction solution was heated to 60 °C and was stirred for 12 hours. The obtained dark brown solution was poured into ice water and the aqueous layer was adjusted to pH 7 with solid sodium hydrogen carbonate. Ethyl acetate extraction afforded the crude product, the chloroenal (6-[1-hydroxy,2-chloro-ethenyl]-1,1,4,4-tetramethyl-7-propoxy-1,2,3,4-tetrahydronaphthalene), 0.128 grams, as an orange/brown oil. A solution of the crude chloroenal in dioxane:water (3:2; 5 ml) was added to a solution of NaOH (0.061 grams, 1.52 mmol) in dioxane: H₂O (3:2; 20 ml), at 80 °C, and the reaction mixture was stirred for 2 hours, to yield an orange reaction

solution. The reaction solution was cooled to room temperature, poured into brine and extracted with EtOAc. The organic phase was dried (MgSO₄), filtered, and concentrated to afford an orange oil which was purified by radial chromatography (10:1 hexane:ethyl acetate) to give the product 6-ethynyl-1,1,4,4,-tetramethyl-7-propoxy-1,2,3,4-tetrahydronaphthalene (39 %) as a yellow oil [¹H-NMR (400MHz, CDCl₃): d 7.38(s, 1H, Ar-H), 6.76(s, 1H, Ar-H), 3.98 (t, J=6.6Hz, 2H, OCH₃), 3.19 (s, 1H, CH), 1.83 (m, 2H, CH₂), 1.66 (m, 2H, 2CH₂), 1.26 (s, 6H, 2CH₃), 1.23 (s, 6H, 2CH₃), 0.93 (t, J=7.4 Hz, 3H, CH₃)].

Synthesis of 3-(3-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-tetramethylnaphthalene-2-yl) propynenitrile:

Ethyl magnesium bromide (3.33 ml of a 1.0 M solution in THF, 3.32 mmol) was added dropwise to a room temperature solution of the acetylene ether (6-ethynyl-1,1,4,4,-tetramethyl-7-propoxy-1,2,3,4-tetrahydronaphthalene) (0.450 grams, 1.66 mmol) in THF (10 ml). The solution was heated to reflux for 6 hours and then cooled to room temperature. Phenyl cyanate (0.40 grams, 0.50 ml, 3.33 mmol) was added (neat) to the reaction solution and the reflux was continued for additional 2 hours. The reaction solution was cooled to room temperature and quenched with a saturated ammonium chloride solution. Aqueous workup followed by radial chromatography (20:1hexanes:EtOAc) afforded the product 3-(5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-3-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydronaphthalen-2-yl)-propynenitrile (80%) as a yellow solid; ¹H-NMR (400MHz, CDCl₃): d 7.44 (s, 1H, Ar-H), 6.78 (s, 1H, Ar-H), 3.97 (t, J=6.5Hz, 2H, OCH₂), 1.83 (m, 2H, CH₂), 1.67 (m, 2H, 2CH₂), 1.27 (s, 6H, 2CH₃), 1.24 (s, 6H, 2CH₃), 1.03 (t, J=7.3Hz, 3H, CH₃).

Synthesis of 3-(3-propoxy-5,5,8,8,-tetramethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-naphthalene-2-yl)but-2-enenitrile:

A flame dried flask was charged with a suspension of copper(I) iodide (0.057 grams, 0.298 mmol) in THF (5 ml) and the mixture was stirred at 0 °C under nitrogen atmosphere. Methyl lithium (0.43 ml of a 1.4 M solution in ether, 0.596 mmol) was added dropwise to give a colorless solution. The

solution was cooled to -78 °C and afforded a yellow/brown color. The acetylene nitrile 3-(5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-3-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydronaphthalene-2-yl)propionitrile (0.040 grams, 0.135 mmol) in THF (3.0 ml) was added dropwise and the solution was stirred at -78 °C for 45 minutes and then quenched with methanol (5 ml). An aqueous workup afforded the cis-alkene nitrile 3-(3-propoxy-5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydronaphthalene-2-yl)but-2-enenitrile (97 %) as a yellow oil; ¹H-NMR (400MHz, CDCl₃): d 7.19 (s, 1H, Ar-H), 6.78 (s, 1H, Ar-H), 5.35 (s, 1H, olefinic), 3.92 (t, J=6.4Hz, 2H, OCH₂), 2.27 (s, 3H, CH₃), 1.79 (m, 2H, CH₂), 1.67 (s, 2H, 2CH₂), 1.28 (s, 6H, 2CH₃), 1.27 (s, 6H, 2CH₃), 1.02 (t, J=7.4 Hz, 3H, CH₃).

Synthesis of (2E, 4E, 6Z)-7-3[-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-2-naphthalene-2-yl]-3-methylocta-2,4,6-trienoic acid]:

A round-bottomed flask equipped with N₂ bubbler, septa, and a stir bar was charged with a solution of 3-(3-propoxy-5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-naphthalene-2-yl)-but-2-enenitrile adduct in hexanes (5 ml) and toluene (5ml), and was then cooled to -78 °C. DIBAL (3.71 ml of a 1.0 M solution in toluene, 5.6 mmol) was added dropwise via syringe to the solution which was then stirred for 1.5 hour at -78 °C, quenched with aqueous sodium potassium tartarate solution (10 ml) and warmed to room temperature over 30 minutes. The aqueous layer was acidified (1.0 M HCl to pH=4) and extracted with EtOAc (3 x 10 ml). The combined organic extracts were washed with water and brine, dried (sodium sulfate), filtered, and concentrated to give the cis-alkenyl, cis-3-(3-propoxy-5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydronaphthalene-2-yl)but-2-enal as a yellow oil; ¹H-NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃): d 9.36 (d, J=8.4 Hz, 1H, CHO), 6.99 (s, 1H, Ar-H), 6.79 (s, 1H, Ar-H), 6.09 (s, J=8.4 Hz, 1H, olefinic), 3.90 (t, J=6.5 Hz, 2H, OCH₂), 2.29 (s, 3H, CH₃), 1.76 (m, 2H, CH₂), 1.68 (s, 2H, 2CH₂), 1.3 (s, 6H, 2CH₃), 1.24 (s, 6H, 2CH₃), 1.00 (t, J=7.4 Hz, 3H, CH₃).

A flame-dried round-bottomed flask equipped with a nitrogen bubbler, septa, and a stir bar was then charged with a solution of diethyl 3-

ethoxycarbonyl-2-methyl-prop-2-enyl phosphonate (0.417 grams, 1.58 mmol, 0.39 ml) in THF (2.0 ml) and 1,3-Dimethyl-3,4,5,6-tetrahydro-2(1H)-pyrimidinone (DMPU, 0.7 ml). The solution was cooled to -78°C , and n-butyl lithium (0.96 ml of a 1.5 M solution in hexanes, 1.44 mmol) was added dropwise via a syringe. The reaction mixture was warmed to 0°C and stirred for 15 minutes. The resulting solution was then cooled to -78°C and cis-3-(3-propoxy-5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-naphthalene-2-yl)but-2-enal (1.31 mmol) was added dropwise via cannula. The solution was warmed to ambient temperature. After stirring for 1.5 hours, the reaction was quenched with water (15 ml), and the aqueous layer was extracted with EtOAc (3 x 10 ml). The combined organic layers were washed with aqueous CuSO_4 , water, and brine, dried under sodium sulfate, filtered, and concentrated to give a crude ester (2E, 4E, 6Z)-7-3[-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro 5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-2-naphthalene-2-yl]-3-methyl-octa-2,4,6-trienoic acid ethyl ester. The crude ester was hydrolyzed with KOH (excess) in methanol (7 ml) at reflux temperature and quenched with 1 M HCl (5 ml). The solution was concentrated, diluted with water (10 ml) and the aqueous layer was extracted with EtOAc (3 x 15 ml). The combined organic layers were washed with water and brine, dried over NaSO_4 , filtered, concentrated, purified by radial chromatography followed by preparative silica gel TLC to give (2E, 4E, 6Z)-7-3[-propoxy-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro- 5,5,8,8-tetramethyl-2-naphthalene-2-yl]-3-methylocta-2,4,6-trienoic acid] as a pale yellow solid; m.p. $177\text{--}179^{\circ}\text{C}$; $^1\text{H-NMR}$ (400 MHz, CDCl_3): δ 6.95 (s, 1H, Ar-H), 6.79 (s, 1H, Ar-H), 6.62 (dd, $J=15.3, 11.0\text{Hz}$, 1H, olefinic), 6.22 (app br d, 2H, 2* olefinic), 5.76 (s, 1H, olefinic), 3.89 (t, $J=6.5\text{ Hz}$, 2H, OCH_2), 2.19 (s, 3H, CH_3), 2.13 (s, 3H, 2CH_3), 1.77(m, 2H, CH_2), 1.68 (s, 4H, 2CH_2), 1.30 (s, 6H, 2CH_3), 1.23 (s, 6H, 2CH_3), 1.01 (t, $J=7.4\text{Hz}$, 3H, CH_3).

Synthesis of the RAR+RXR antagonist 4-[5H-2,3-(2,5-Dimethyl-2,5-Hexano) 5-Methyl-8-nitrodibenzo [b,e] [1,4] diazepin-11-yl) Benzoic acid [designated HX 531]:

Synthesis of the RAR+RXR antagonist HX531 was accomplished based

Solutions of hydrogen peroxide (1.05 moles) and ferrous sulfate (1 mole and 1 mole of sulfuric acid) were added simultaneously and equivalently to an aqueous solution of t-butyl alcohol (285 ml or 3 moles in 800 ml of water containing 23 ml of sulfuric acid) at 30 °C. A 36 % yield of semi-solid product possessing a camphor-like odor was thereby isolated. The 2,5-dimethyl-2,5-hexanediol product was purified by drying and recrystallization (EtOAc) (melting point (mp): 85-87 °C).

The synthesis was accomplished as previously described [Mayr, H., et al., Chem. Ber. 124: 203, 1999]. 2,5-Dimethyl-2,5-hexanediol (73.1 grams, 0.500 mol) was stirred with 37 % aqueous HCl (250 ml) for 1 hour. The initially homogeneous mixture precipitated to yield a crystalline product. The product was extracted with 600 ml of petroleum ether and dried with CaCl₂. Evaporation of the solvent yielded 81.9 grams (89 %) of an NMR-spectroscopically pure solid, which was recrystallized from petroleum ether (mp: 68-68.5 °C) as 2,5-dichloro-2,5-dimethylhexane.

A 200 ml round-bottomed flask equipped with a stir bar and a reflux condenser was charged with a solution of bromobenzene (109 mmol, 17 ml) and 2,5-dichloro-2,5-dimethyl hexane (10 grams, 54.6 mmol) in dichloromethane (30 ml). Aluminum chloride (1.45 grams, 10.9 mmol) was added to the solution slowly, until spontaneous reflux subsides. After stirring for 10-15 minutes at room temperature, the reaction was poured into ice water (30 ml) and the layers were separated. The aqueous layer was extracted with EtOAc (5 x 20 ml). The combined organic layer was washed with water and brine, dried over sodium sulfate, filtered, and concentrated, to yield a 6-bromo-

1,2,3,4-tetrahydro- 1,1,4,4-tetramethylnaphthalene product.

A mixture of 6-bromo-1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1,1,4,4-tetramethylnaphthalene (30 grams, 110 mmol), potassium carbonate (56.1 grams, 41 mmol) and copper iodide (4.53 grams) in o-xylene (300 ml) was heated at 150 °C for 14 hours. After removal of the solvent, the residue was purified by silica gel column chromatography (EtOAc:n-hexane 1:100) to yield the product 2-nitro -1-amino-[1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1,1,4,4-tetramethylnaphthalene]-benzene as red plates (n-hexane) (36.09 grams, 82 % yield of title product, mp: 118 °C).

A solution of 2-nitro-1-amino-[1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1,1,4,4-tetramethylnaphthalene]-benzene (500 mg, 1.54 mmol) in DMF (10 ml) was added to a suspension of NaOH (60 %, 92 mg, 2.31 mmol) in DMF (1 ml) and the mixture was stirred for 30 minutes, followed by addition of methyl iodide (0.5 ml) and additional stirring for 1 hour. After removal of the solvent, the residue was taken up in water, and was extracted with dichloromethane. The organic layer was washed with water and brine, and was dried over MgSO₄. Removal of the solvent under vacuum gave a crude product 2-nitro-1-methylamino-[1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1,1,4,4-tetramethyl-naphthalene]benzene (543 mg).

2-Nitro-1-methylamino-[1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1,1,4,4-tetramethyl-naphthalene]benzene (540 mg, 1.53 mmol) was dissolved in 20 ml of ethanol, and was hydrogenated over 10 % ethyl alcohol (55 mg) for 1 hour. After filtration and removal of the solvent, the residue was chromatographed on silica gel (EtOAc:n-hexane 1:8) to give 2-amino-1-methylamino-[1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1,1,4,4-tetramethyl-naphthalene]benzene as the product.

Terephthalic acid monomethyl ester chloride (381 mg, 1.91 mmol) was added to a solution of 2-amino-1-methylamino-[1,2,3,4-tetrahydro- 1,1,4,4-tetramethyl-naphthalene]benzene (420 mg, 1.3 mmol) in benzene (10 ml) and pyridine (2 ml). The mixture was stirred for 4 hours, then poured into 2N hydrochloric acid, and extracted with EtOAc. The organic layer was dried and

was then purified over silica-gel (EtOAc:n-hexane 1:8) to give the product 2-[amido-4-benzoic acid methyl-ester]-1-methyl-amino[1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1,1,4,4-tetramethyl-naphthalene]-Benzene (631 mg).

A solution of 2-[amido-4-benzoic acid methyl-ester]-1-methyl-amino[1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1,1,4,4-tetramethyl-naphthalene]-Benzene (630 mg, 1.30 mmol) in dichloromethane was added to polyphosphoric acid (6.0 grams) and the mixture was heated at 110 °C for 18 hours. After cooling, water was added to the reaction and the product was extracted with dichloromethane. The organic layer was washed with brine, dried over magnesium sulfate, and evaporated. The residue was purified by silica-gel column chromatography (EtOAc:n-hexane 1:6) to yield the product 2-[amido-4-benzoic acid methyl ester]-1-methylamino[1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1,1,4,4-tetramethylnaphthalene]4-nitrobenzene (104 grams).

KNO₃ (73 mg, 0.72 mmol) was added to a solution of 2-[amido-4-benzoic acid methyl ester]-1-methylamino[1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-1,1,4,4-tetramethylnaphthalene]4-nitrobenzene (200 mg, 0.44 mmol) in sulfuric acid (12 ml) at 0 °C. After 2.5 hours, the mixture was poured into ice water and extracted with dichloromethane. The organic layer was washed successively with 1N NaHCO₃, water and brine, and dried over MgSO₄. After evaporation, the residue was purified by silica gel column chromatography (EtOAc:n-hexane 1:8) to give methyl 4-(5H-2,3-(2,5-dimethyl-2,5-hexano)-5-methyl-8-nitrodibenzo [b,e] [1,4] diazepin-11-yl) benzoate (100 mg, 45.5 %) and the product recovered (84 mg). This compound was hydrolyzed under basic conditions (2N NaOH/EtOH) as follows:

Synthesis of 4-(5H-2,3-(2,5-dimethyl-2,5-hexano)-5-methyl-8-nitrodibenzo [b,e] [1,4] diazepin-11-yl) benzoic acid:

A solution of (5H-2,3-(2,5-dimethyl-2,5-hexano)-5-methyl-8-nitrodibenzo[b,e][1,4]diazepin-11-yl]benzoic acid methyl ester (84 mg) in ethanol (4 ml) and 2N NaOH (2 ml) was stirred at room temperature for 2 hours. The mixture was poured into 2N hydrochloric acid, and extracted with

dichloromethane. The organic layer was washed with brine, and dried over magnesium sulfate. After evaporation, the crude product was purified by silica gel column chromatography (dichloromethane:methanol 20:1, then 8:1) to give the product 4-(5H-2,3-(2,5-dimethyl-2,5-hexano)-5-methyl-8-nitrodibenzo [b,e]
 5 [1,4] diazepin-11-yl) benzoic acid, or HX531.

RXR, RAR and RAR+RXR antagonists supplementation of ex-vivo hematopoietic stem/progenitor cell cultures:

Cultures were prepared and maintained as described above. RXR, RAR, or RAR+RXR antagonists were added to some cultures at concentrations
 10 ranging from 10^{-4} M to 10^{-9} M (100 μ M to 10^{-3} M] concentrations corresponding to diluting concentrations of 1550 μ g/l to 0.155 μ g/l]. The antagonist was added for a predetermined, limited time period, for up to three weeks or continuously during the entire culture period.

All other procedures including mononuclear cell fraction collection and
 15 purification, purification of CD34⁺ cells from mononuclear cell fractions, ex-vivo expansion of CD34^{+/-} populations, morphological assessment, surface antigen analysis, determination of CD34 and other hematopoietic marker expression and cell population calculations were carried out as described in the experimental methods section of Example 1 above.

Experimental Results

Comparative effects of RAR, RXR and RAR+RXR antagonists and a combination of RAR and RXR antagonists on the ex vivo expansion of stem and progenitor cells in culture:

5 CD34⁺ cell enriched cultures were initiated in the presence of a combination of 4 cytokines (TPO, FLT3, IL-6 and IL-3), with and without different concentrations of the following antagonists: (i) a retinoic acid receptor (RAR) antagonist AGN 194310, (ii) a retinoic X receptor (RXR) antagonist LGD 100754 and (iii) a combination of the RAR antagonist AGN 194310 and
10 the RXR antagonist LGD 100754. Three and five weeks after the initial seeding, the percentage of cells bearing the CD34⁺ marker (considered to be mostly committed progenitor cells), as well as the percentage of cells bearing the markers CD34⁺/CD38⁻ and CD34⁺Lin⁻ (considered to represent the stem and early progenitor compartment) were ascertained by FACS analysis.

15 The data obtained from cell population counts, CFU counts and FACS analyses are illustrated in Figures 12a-b and 13a-e. The results show that while the RXR antagonist has no activity and the RAR antagonist exerts moderate activity when supplemented to the culture media at a concentration of 10⁻⁷ M and along with the cytokine IL-3 (cell-differentiation accelerator), treatment
20 with the combination of RAR and RXR antagonists resulted in substantially higher levels of CFU, CD34⁺ cells, CD34⁺/38⁻ cells, and CD34⁺/Lin⁻ cells, as compared with the control (cytokines only), the RAR antagonist treatment, and the RXR antagonist treatment. Clearly, the combination of RAR and RXR antagonists exerts a synergistic effect on the *ex vivo* expansion of
25 stem/progenitor cells.

In an additional experiment, CD34⁺ cell enriched cultures were initiated in the presence of a combination of 4 cytokines (TPO, FLT3, IL-6 and IL-3), with and without the RAR+RXR antagonist HX-531 (i.e., antagonist to both retinoic acid and retinoic X receptors) (10⁻⁶ M; MW=483). The levels of CFU
30 and CD34⁺ cells were determined 3, 7, 9 and 11 weeks after the initial seeding.

The results of this experiment are summarized in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Time after seeding (weeks)	CONTROL (cytokines only)		RAR+RXR ANTAGONIST HX-531 (10^{-5} M)	
	CFU ($\times 10^3$)	CD34 ⁺ ($\times 10^4$)	CFU ($\times 10^3$)	CD34 ⁺ ($\times 10^4$)
3	2256	181	1920(120 mixed)	167
5	1338	46	8542	1636
9	307	0	36557	4977
11	0	0	67338	4055

- 5 These results indicate that the RAR+RXR antagonist preferably enables marked proliferation, yet limited differentiation of the stem cell compartment, thus directly impact the high fold expansion of stem/progenitor cells during short- and long-term culture period.

10

EXAMPLE 4

Synthesis of the Vitamin D receptor (VDR) antagonist 1 alpha, 25-(OH) 2D3-26,23-lactone:

- Synthesis of the four diastereoisomers of 1 alpha, 25-(OH) 2D3-26,23-lactone can be accomplished as described in Ishizuka, S. et. al, Archives of
15 Biochemistry and Biophysics 242: 82,1985, or according to the following procedure:

Synthesis of Methyl 4-Iodo-2-Methyl-Butyrate:

- To a suspension of lithium in 2 ml ether (dry) under stream of nitrogen, a solution of phenyl bromide in 3 ml ether was added dropwise. The reaction
20 mixture was heated until complete dissolution of the lithium was achieved. A solution of methylene iodide in ether was prepared under a stream of argon and was cooled to - 78 °C. The phenyl lithium solution was added dropwise to this solution by a syringe during 0.5 hour, and a solution of methyl (R)-(+)-3-

bromo-2-methylpropionate in ether (5 ml) was then added thereto. The reaction mixture was stirred overnight at 25 °C. DMSO (7 ml) was then added and the ether was evaporated. The reaction mixture was stirred overnight at 100 °C.

Synthesis of (1 alpha, 3 Beta, 5E, 7E, 20R, 1'E)-1,3-bis-(tert-butyltrimethylsilyloxy)-20-Methyl(2-Methyl,1'-Heptenylate)-9,10-secopregna-5,7,10,(19)-triene:

To a suspension of lithium metal in 2 ml of dry ether, a solution of phenyl bromide in 3 ml of dry ether was added dropwise, under nitrogen atmosphere. An exothermic reaction was observed during the dissolution of the lithium metal. The reaction mixture was heated until complete dissolution of the lithium metal was achieved.

Triphenylphosphine 99% (1.447 grams, 5.52 mmol) and DMSO were added to the reaction solution of methyl 4-iodo-2-methyl-butyrate described above and the resulting mixture was heated to 100 °C for 18 hours. The mixture was then cooled to -30 °C under nitrogen atmosphere, and the phenyl lithium solution in ether was added thereto.

This reaction mixture was stirred at 0 °C for 1 hour and thereafter a hexane solution of the aldehyde CLP-8 - Beta,5E,7E,20R,1'E)-1,3-bis-(tert-butyltrimethylsilyloxy)-9,10-secopregna-5,7,10,(19)-triene-aldehyde - was added. The obtained mixture was stirred at 100 °C overnight. The ether and the hexane were thereafter distilled, the reaction mixture was cooled to 60 °C and 50 ml ethyl acetate in 75 ml water were added thereto. The Organic layer was separated, washed with 25 ml water and brine and dried over sodium sulfate. The organic solvent was evaporated under reduced pressure and the residue was dried under high vacuum and was purified on silica gel column (60 grams) with a mixture of hexane-EtOAc (98:2) as an eluent, to obtain 60 mg of the product (1 alpha,3 Beta,5E,7E,20R,1'E)-1,3-bis- (tert-butyltrimethylsilyloxy)-20-(2-methyl,1'heptenylate)-9,10-secopregna-5,7,10,(19)-triene.

Synthesis of (1 alpha, 3 beta, 5E, 7E, 20R, 1'E)-1,3-bis-(tert-

butyldimethylsilyloxy)-20-(2-methyl-2-hydroxy-1'-heptenoic acid)-9,10-secopregna-5,7,10,(19)-triene :

(1 α , 3 β , 5E, 7E, 20R, 1'E)-1,3-bis-(tert-butyldimethylsilyloxy)-20-(2-methyl-1'-heptenylate)-9,10-secopregna-5, 7, 10, (19)-triene (60 mg) was dissolved in 3 ml THF and the solution was cooled to -78 °C under a stream of argon. LiN(iPr)₂ was added to the reaction mixture, so as to obtain the lithium derivative, which was further reacted with oxygen for 1 hour at -78 °C. Triphenylphosphine was then added and the reaction mixture was stirred for 30 minutes. The resulting reaction mixture was then evaporated under vacuum. A solution of KOH in methanol was added to the residue and the reaction mixture was heated to 60 °C for 2.5 hours and was thereafter diluted with 0.5 ml 1N HCl, and evaporated under vacuum. The residue was dissolved in chloroform and the product was purified on silica gel plate (20 x 20), using a mixture of 97:3 hexane-ethyl acetate (2 times) as the eluent., to obtain 6.3 mg of the product as fraction 2 (R_f = 0.81).

The obtained product was then treated with a solution of 15.2 mg iodine in 2 ml methylene chloride, in the presence of pyridine (12 mg) and the reaction mixture was evaporated under vacuum and thereafter under high vacuum. The residue was dissolved with THF and n-Bu₃SnH (29.1 mg) was added thereto. The reaction mixture was stirred at room temperature for 4 hours and was thereafter evaporated under vacuum.

The residue was treated with catalytic amounts of HCl in methanol at 50 °C for 5 hours. The reaction mixture was evaporated under vacuum and the residue was purified on silica gel TLC plate (20 x 20) using a mixture of 95:5 chloroform-methanol as the eluent, to obtain 2.64 mg of the desired product 9,10-secocholesta-5,7,10(19)-trien-26-oic acid, 1,3,23,25-tetrahydroxy-gamma-lactone or (23S, 25R)-1 α ,25-DihydroxyvitaminD3-26,23-lactone, as fraction 1 (R_f = 0.4); FAB-MS: Calc. 426.60, Found 426.88.

EFFECT OF NICOTINAMIDE ON EX-VIVO EXPANSION OF HEMATOPOIETIC STEM/PROGENITOR CELLS

Nicotinamide supplementation of ex-vivo hematopoietic 5 stem/progenitor cell cultures:

Cultures were prepared and maintained as described above. Nicotinamide was added to cell cultures at concentrations of 1, 5 or 10 mM for up to three weeks culture period. All other procedures including mononuclear cell fraction collection and purification, purification of CD34⁺ cells from
10 mononuclear cell fractions, ex-vivo expansion of stem/progenitor cell populations, morphological assessment, surface antigen analysis, determination of CD34, CD38, Lin and other hematopoietic marker expression and cell population calculations were carried out as described in the experimental methods section of Example 1 above.

15

Experimental Results

Effects of nicotinamide on the ex-vivo expansion of stem and progenitor hematopoietic cells:

Hematopoietic CD34⁺ cell cultures were initiated in the presence of a
20 combination of 5 cytokines, SCF, TPO, FLt3, IL-6 and IL-3, with or without different concentrations of nicotinamide. Following three weeks incubation period, the CD34⁺ cells were re-selected from culture by affinity re-purification method and were enumerated. The results, presented in Figure 14, show that cultures supplemented with 1 and 5 mM nicotinamide yielded 99×10^4 and 180
25 $\times 10^4$ CD34⁺ cells per ml, respectively, as compared with only 35×10^4 CD34⁺ cells per ml in the non-treated (cytokines only) control. In addition, the re-selected CD34⁺ cell fraction was FACS analyzed for stem/progenitor cell markers. The results, presented in Figures 15-17 and 18a-b, show substantial increases in the proportion of CD34⁺/CD38⁻, CD34⁺/Lin⁻ and CD34⁺/(HLA-
30 DR38⁻) cells in cultures treated with nicotinamide. Figure 15 shows that

cultures supplemented with 1 and 5 mM nicotinamide resulted in 1.7 and 51.7 fold increase, respectively, in CD34⁺/CD38⁻ cells density, as compared with the untreated (cytokines only) control. Figure 16 shows that cultures supplemented with 1 and 5 mM nicotinamide resulted in 10.5 and 205.5 fold increase, respectively, in CD34⁺/Lin⁻ cells density, as compared with the untreated (cytokines only) control. Figure 17 shows that cultures supplemented with 5 mM nicotinamide resulted in 11.5 fold increase in CD34⁺/(HLA-DR38⁻) cells density, as compared with the untreated (cytokines only) control. Hence, nicotinamide was found to be a very effective agent for promoting *ex vivo* expansion of stem and progenitor cells.

In an additional experiment, cultures were treated with 5 and 10 mM nicotinamide. Table 5 below presents the obtained results, which further demonstrate the powerful effect of nicotinamide on *ex-vivo* expansion of stem and early progenitor cells.

Table 5

Treatment	% of CD34 ⁺ /CD38 ⁻ of total cells	% of CD34 ⁺ /Lin ⁻ of total cells
control	1.69	0.02
Nicotinamide (5 mM)	9.69	4.11
Nicotinamide (10 mM)	34.67	16.58

It is appreciated that certain features of the invention, which are, for clarity, described in the context of separate embodiments, may also be provided in combination in a single embodiment. Conversely, various features of the invention, which are, for brevity, described in the context of a single embodiment, may also be provided separately or in any suitable subcombination.

Although the invention has been described in conjunction with specific embodiments thereof, it is evident that many alternatives, modifications and variations will be apparent to those skilled in the art. Accordingly, it is intended to embrace all such alternatives, modifications and variations that fall
5 within the spirit and broad scope of the appended claims. All publications, patents and patent applications mentioned in this specification are herein incorporated in their entirety by reference into the specification, to the same extent as if each individual publication, patent and patent application was specifically and individually indicated to be incorporated herein by reference.
10 In addition, citation or identification of any reference in this application shall not be construed as an admission that such reference is available as prior art to the present invention.

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